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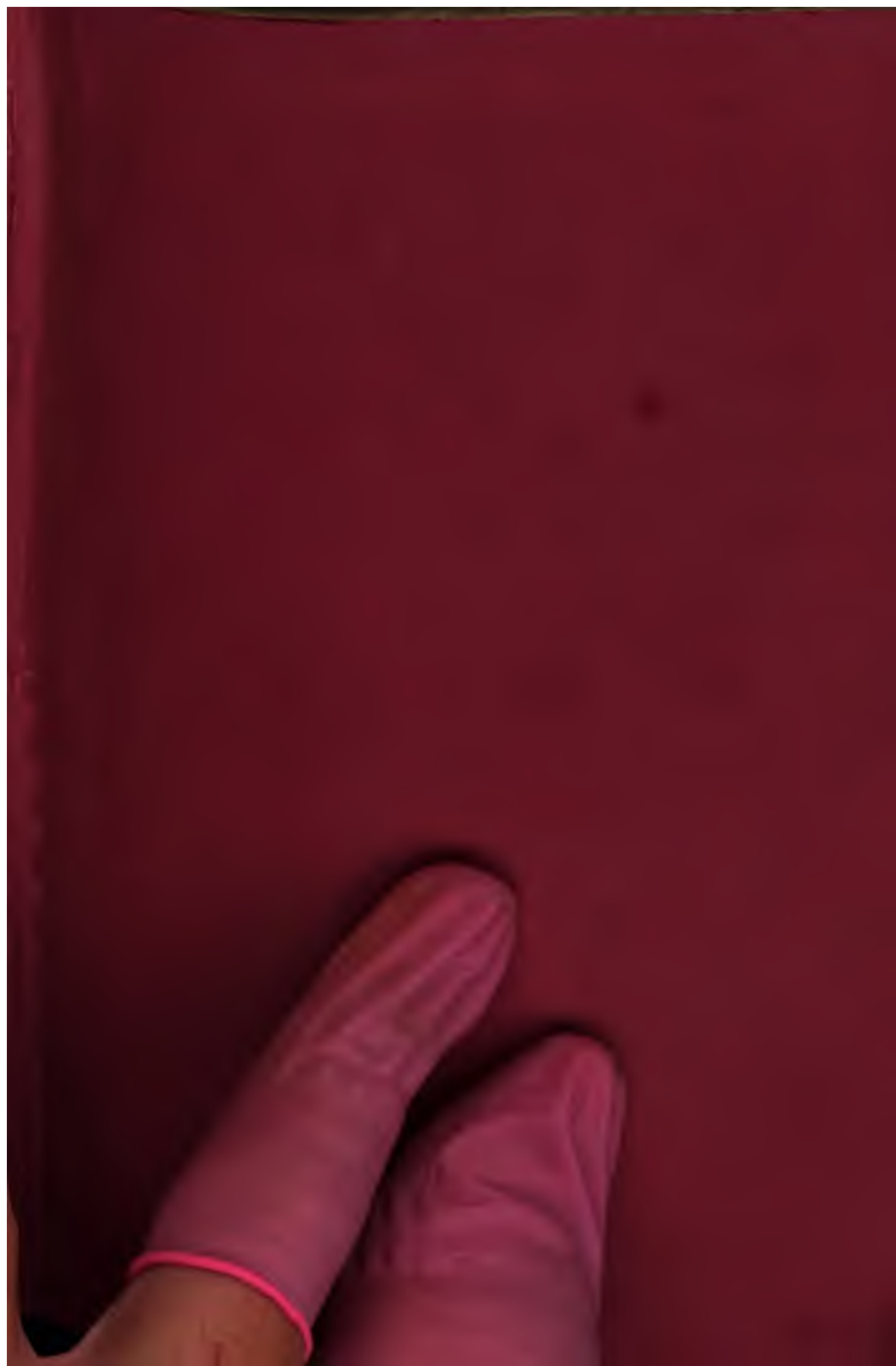
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NORA'S LOVE TEST.

VOL. II.

NORA'S LOVE TEST.

BY

MARY CECIL HAY,

AUTHOR OF

"OLD MYDDELTON'S MONEY,"

"THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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NORA'S LOVE TEST.

CHAPTER I.

These arrows of yours, though they have hit me, they have not hurt ; they have no killing quality.—HOWELL.

THE dingy schoolroom in Great Cumberland Place was very silent this morning, not only because its two occupants were busy, but because neither the glad April music of the country, nor the restless loud pulsation of the town, could find its way through the hazy window-panes.

"I never shall remember," said Nora, breaking the silence at last, in a tone of perplexity, without raising her eyes from the list of questions over which she was pondering, "who—besides George IV.—was called 'the first gentle-

man in Europe.' I hope, whoever he was, he had more claim to the compliment. This is the last question but one, and I've looked all through my reference books in vain. Tell me, Miss Archer. Ah, do!"

"Louis d'Artois," the governess answered, smiling at the Irish coaxing. Then Nora buried herself again in her book, hurrying to do her task, because she knew a pause would be sure to take her thoughts away beyond the hope of recall.

"Even yet," thought Miss Archer, before bending her eyes again upon the exercise she was correcting, "it is only by a real effort that she can apply herself. But she makes the effort bravely still, as she has made it all through the year."

For—within just six days—a whole year has passed since Nora first began to study in this dismal room at Great Cumberland Place. Day by day, morning and afternoon, had she sat there studying, with the governess who had tried so hard and so kindly to accommodate her patient, unambitious nature to the enthusiastic complex one of the girl whom she had grown to love so well—the girl who, though so solitary in this English home, made it for the first time

feel like home to Helen, by her warm and ready sympathy, by her gaiety and frank affection.

So they were good friends now, the silent woman who had to look backward to her childhood for any brightness in her dreams, and the fearless, ardent girl who looked so credulously onward to the impossible pleasures life was to bring her.

Nora had studied without repining; while the Spring melted into Summer, and Summer ripened to Autumn; while Autumn faded to Winter, and Winter blossomed once more into Spring. She asked for no holiday, however she might have longed for it; and, as neither Mrs. Foster nor her daughters considered the encouraging of holidays an item in their agreement, the days went on, filled only by these new tasks, against the weariness of which Nora fought so well.

But not everyone had been so indifferent to Nora's occasional enjoyment, and the effort had often been made, though always fruitlessly, to procure her a day's amusement or a few hours' change of air and ideas. Again and again had Miss Archer begged that in their leisure afternoons, or on a rare evening, she might show Nora some pretty spot she knew, beyond the

usual boundaries of their walk, or some of the pictures about which they were never tired of talking; that she might procure for Nora an afternoon at Kew or Richmond, or an evening at Covent Garden or St. James's Hall, for she was even anxious to deny herself if she could have given a treat to Nora. They used to talk over these plans for days before, proposing to get away early, to go over one of the picture-galleries, and then, before the concert, to take tea in town, to lengthen the enjoyment and make it more of a change. And it was well that the anticipation afforded such pleasure to them, for the reality never followed. Quite bright and pleasant these holidays were in the sunny groves of imagination, taking beautiful forms which might have dwarfed and darkened—so Helen Archer, after each refusal, tried to believe—if they had been led out into the bare plains of actual life.

Others too had planned holidays and pleasures for Nora, though she did not guess it. Willoughby Foster's entreaties for a visit to his home in Surrey, and the occasional distinctly-worded invitations of Mr. Poynz, were met by the same placid, extenuating negative, which, with all its justification, was a negative de-

cisive. Mrs. Foster, having charge of this peculiarly situated girl, found it impossible to relieve herself of the constant and anxious burden of responsibility the charge involved, but was determined to do her best to make the year a well and advisedly spent period of study, and then——

The wonderful, calm indulgence of that apotheosis always, except in one rare instance, filled Mrs. Foster's hearers with admiration. How wise it was of her to allow her solid judgment of what was best for the girl's welfare to outweigh the inclinations of her kindly, cherishing, compliant disposition !

"The child's guardian left her in my care," she would add, gently dismissing the subject ; "and, if I permit a repetition of the danger and disgrace in which she voluntarily placed herself on her first arrival here, I shall consider only myself to blame. I could not quite exonerate her, of course, but at the same time I could not blame *her* alone, as I could one of my own daughters, whose instincts are so reliable. Therefore I should blame myself."

For what, Mrs. Foster did not explain ; but evidently she had no inclination to undergo that ordeal in her own person, for she kept

Nora constantly at her tasks, and allowed her own daughters unrestrainedly to follow their "reliable instincts."

Once Nora had accompanied Dr. Armstrong and Victoria Foster to the Albert Hall, and, while they whispered and laughed together, she had sat rapt in wonder and delight; but the possible pleasure of another such hour dissolved when his low whispering words were addressed to herself. The romance left everything when he showed her how little the music was to everybody but herself, and what his motive was in bringing her. And from that day no entreaty of his could win her from her books to join him and Victoria. How he chafed when his persistent efforts to amuse were accepted only by Nora's fellow-student—who, indeed, was only so in name, and rarely entered the schoolroom, except at the summons of her music-master—no one could guess, for he was always bland as usual, and there was good reason for Tory to build her fabric of self-satisfaction on his constant and unequivocal attentions. For how could she look behind the smiles, and see the contortions of jealousy and passion? And under his suave speeches how

could she detect the notes of anger and mortified defeat?

So Miss Victoria Foster smiled on, and fancied Nuel Armstrong revelled in her smiles. After all, self-deception was pleasanter while it lasted than would have been the knowledge, or even the suspicion, that the experienced, intelligent physician valued Nora's slightest question, or even undisguised rebuff, beyond her own most gracious token of regard. He had spent much of the past year in England, for a month at a time leaving his Irish patients to his partner at Fintona; and again and again he had repeated his willingness to settle in London if Nora wished. When he would boldly assert this, Nora would gravely discuss his prospects, adding simply that of course it could not signify to her, but it might be pleasant to him—did he think it would? It was after such speeches as these that Nuel found it so hard to curb the jealousy within him, and keep the bland expression on his face to mislead other eyes. For Nora, weary of telling him truthfully how impossible it would ever be to love him "like a lover," could make only such answers as these, when, before others, he dared to refer to his

future plans as affecting her. Long before the end of the year, he had given up his futile attempts to induce her to acknowledge to him that she was unhappy where she was, and longed to escape from her thralldom of work and seclusion; for even *he* had become aware that all persistency would be unavailing for that.

Through the whole twelve months, Mrs. Foster had not migrated with her household to the country or the seaside, for she was wise enough to see that, by husbanding her resources during this year, the sum from Nora's guardian would be doubly valuable after Nora had left them. So she had paid one or two short visits with her younger daughter, but only while Genevieve was at home; and when Miss Foster herself went away on more frequent and protracted visits, her mother and sister were left at home. So that Nora was never allowed to find out the repressed good-nature of Mrs. Foster, or to know how much less dull the mother and son together, during Willoughby's visits, could make the ungenial London house. Swayed entirely by the influence of whoever last appealed to her, Mrs. Foster had, through this year of Nora's probation, been cold and indiffer-

ent to her, with occasional varying fits of exacting frigidity, and amiable resignation to the will of fate in consigning to her such a trying charge.

With Genevieve, Nora had had little to do, while still her influence was the depressing influence of the girl's life. For Genevieve the world was *self*, and, when she languidly acceded that the world was "very good," the words were but at heart self-praise. Once or twice at first Nora had frankly and hotly replied to Miss Foster's unkind or contemptuous treatment, but she soon left it off; for, to the proud, warm-hearted girl, what could have been more difficult to bear, or fight with, than the smiling, compassionate remark—"You seem very suspicious, Miss St. George; it is a pity, for your own sake?"

So Nora had by degrees come to pass by, in simple dignity, Miss Foster's cutting observations or unkind actions, and, if the deepest motives had guided her, instead of the most simple, she could not more successfully have roused the jealous irritability which was hidden under Genevieve's gracious manner. And so, though there were still rare occasions when the honourable, untrained nature rose in prompt

rebellion against some petty arrogance, and hotly stood on the defensive, such scenes were very brief and rare now ; and Nora was always ready frankly to acknowledge her share of the wrong. Then, if Miss Foster's chilly acceptance of her apology could move her to any feeling at all, it was only one of quiet amusement.

Celia Pennington had never come to London on that visit which Genevieve had foreshadowed for her on the Sunday she had spent at Kilver Vicarage. It was no new thing for Genevieve Foster graciously to deal forth those bubbles of invitation which float serenely from the giver's lips, and smoothly break and dissolve without a sound in the chaos of utter forgetfulness ; but Nora did not know this, and so week by week, for fifty weeks, she had been anticipating from Celia the tidings of an approaching visit. Now of course that anticipation was over, for in one week more Nora would see her old companion at home. She had quite decided to return to Kilver, and had been carefully husbanding money sufficient to take her, if Mr. Doyle made no proposal of fetching or sending for her. It would be time for her to seek a situation as governess, but could she not do so there ? And would it not

be better and happier for her to be in Ireland than here, where, after twelve long months, she was still an utter stranger?

In spite of her sturdy application to her tasks, it was always with a very suspicious readiness that Nora welcomed any legitimate interruption of them; and so now, when, after a rap upon the door, Mr. Poynz entered the schoolroom, she was not at all unwilling to transfer her attention from Louis d'Artois to Mark himself. And Helen Archer turned from her corrections, and took up her knitting with a flush of pleasure upon her face—for what more welcome break had that schoolroom life than a visit from one who seemed to have taken them both as friends, governess and pupil alike?

"Isn't it a pity," said Nora, gravely, her hands folded on her book, "that they are all out? I mean a pity for you, Mr. Poynz, not for us. And you've been away three whole weeks, haven't you? Mrs. Foster will be so sorry to miss you."

"I should be so exceedingly sorry to miss Mrs. Foster," returned Mark, tranquilly, "that I intend to wait for her return."

"I'm afraid they may drive a long way,"

Nora went on ; "and they've been gone only about ten minutes."

\ "Hardly ten minutes yet."

"Did you know, then?" exclaimed Nora, with the liveliest surprise that he should have come in under those circumstances.

"Yes ;

'I saw them go ; one horse was blind,
The tails of both hung down behind,
Their shoes were on their feet.' "

"Miss Foster had a new bonnet on," observed Nora, lifting her silken lashes to meet his quizzical gaze, and then, with a blush, becoming aware of something at the fire which she had forgotten.

"I remarked it ; Miss Foster had a new bonnet, Miss Victoria Foster a newer bonnet, and Mrs. Foster the newest bonnet of all. Byron would have been charmed if he had had my passing opportunity, for they were—as he considered that a lady and her daughters should be—shining like a guinea and two seven-shilling pieces."

"They looked very stylish," observed Nora, anxiously following the new direction of Mark's eyes as he moved to the hearthrug. "And how did you find out one horse was blind? Mrs.

Foster doesn't like people to know. When I told her he would have reminded me a little of Borak if he had had any eyes, she didn't like it."

"I suppose you are working intensely hard, as usual?" observed Mark, pointedly; for just then he stood before a curious piece of mechanism. Two lengths of string were suspended from rulers which projected from the mantelpiece and were made secure there by the ballast of a pile of lesson-books. And his eyes wandered slowly down the curveting twine, and rested upon the apple which swung gently round at the extremity of each. "Are these two special experiments in your Gargantuan course of study, Miss St. George?"

"It depends," rejoined Nora, blushing a little, but accepting publicity now as inevitable, and making the best of it, "on what 'Gargantuan' means. But they will be very nice when they are quite done; much better than questions in history. I have another, Mr. Poynz. Will you help me to fix it up and roast it for you?"

Why it took him so long to do this, Nora could not understand, as she had arranged her own quite as scientifically in half the time; and she laughed a good deal as she deftly rectified

his mistakes, and drew Miss Archer into the task too. And why he should suppose that that last apple laboured under such a decided disadvantage that it was absolutely necessary for them all to watch it with tenderness, and to experimentalise constantly upon its puffy cheeks, and, in fact, to bestow in unison a peculiar amount of solicitude upon it, was a mystery which she had not fathomed even when the anxiety of cooking was over, and they were all enjoying the fruit of their labours—now in a spirit of the gravest criticism, and now with irrepressible laughter.

“That branch of study,” observed Mark, when the feast was over, “is, as you say, Miss St. George, better than questions in history. The length of Charles the First’s beard is a matter of insignificance compared with the secret of giving such a delicious flavour to——”

“The sugar did that,” put in Nora, because he paused without finishing his sentence. “I used to roast apples at Traveere sometimes. I wish Miss Archer were coming back with me to Traveere—I mean to Kilver.”

“When do you go?”

“In about a week now. I don’t know what

day till Mr. Doyle writes. I think he will come for me."

"Do you? Now I shrewdly suspect he will be persuaded to depute some one else to the task. And so the year is over," Mark went on, his handsome, steadfast eyes upon her face, "and you have had your feast of the dainties which are bred in a book?"

"Yes, and know nothing even yet," asserted Nora, with a sigh.

"Of course not; except that you have acquired a vast experience of the world, which"—with a quizzical glance at the plates which held the remnants of their feast—"has evidently lost all its relish for you. Your education may well be considered complete, Miss St. George, now that you have attained the knowledge of the century, and understand how flat, stale, and unprofitable is every thing under the sun; and how essential it is for us that we should not at all say what we mean, or on any account mean what we say."

"Fire away, Flanagan!"

Anything so comical as Nora's grave interposition of this remark, in that low pretty voice of hers, could hardly be conceived; yet it was

no wonder Miss Archer looked concerned and sorry.

"Oh!" cried the girl, distressed in a moment, even before she saw Helen's annoyance, but with a little defiance in her nervousness. "I didn't mean to say it—but it's no harm. If you were Irish, Mr. Poynz, you'd know it wasn't. It isn't slang or—or anything, Miss Archer. It was a real message Cromwell sent to Flanagan's castle when he was besieging it. Our Vicar knows the castle, and Flanagan defended it with a great show, and threatened to fire his cannon unless Cromwell's men retreated. So Cromwell wrote him back that message, and it has passed into a sort of proverb in some parts of Ireland."

"What did Flanagan do?"

"He ran away. After all, he ran away very quickly, so—I don't think he could have been Irish."

"I expect he was," returned Miss Archer, with a smile. "Let us say so, as we are all English."

"It is very evident to me," said Mr. Poynz, "even now that the whole year is over, Miss Nora, that you are scarcely to be called educated."

"Yet I couldn't work harder even if I were," she rejoined, with a regretful sigh; "I was only yesterday pitying Lord Saye when I read that 'he had men about him that usually talked of a noun, and a verb, and such abominable words as no Christian ear can endure to hear.'"

"And you are very tired of it all?"

"No, no!" she answered, with pleasant eagerness. "Miss Archer makes lessons different for me. It is only a few that are tedious. She is very, very kind to me, and this year's hard work must have tired her very much."

"The year has contained for you, Nora, so little besides hard work," put in the governess.

"Then has everyone else been as unsuccessful as I have been to win you a holiday?" inquired Mr. Poynz, a little sternly. "Have you seen *nothing* of London?"

"Oh! yes," said Nora, wondering at his change of tone. "Though I should have known far less," she added, with a little heightening of the soft pink in her cheeks, "if I hadn't lost myself on my first morning. Yes, we have seen many things, Miss Archer and I. We look into every shop-window we pass—even into the windows of private houses sometimes—at least

I do. It is so tempting to catch a glimpse of some one else's home."

"Rude rather."

"Yes, I know it is, and I try not; but I find myself doing it, and building little romances in the rooms, or about the people, if I see any. Then we look up the doorways of concert-halls and picture-galleries and theatres, and—talk about going."

"You want to go, then?" interrogated Mark, with unsuspected earnestness in his tone. "You want to see the world and its—follies?"

"They cannot be follies to me while I don't know them."

"And you really want to go?" he persisted, rising and standing with his back to the fire to look down upon her.

"Really—really!"

"Well, it will all come. And then what a pleasure you will have! Almost as great as that of the one who gives you the pleasure."

"But I am going to be a governess," said Nora, looking up gravely into his face. "Who will ever offer to take me then, as Miss Archer does now?"

"A pupil perhaps," replied Mark, briefly, turning away the discussion as he looked in-

tently into her eyes. "Do you know that Foster heard this morning from Dr. Armstrong? He will soon be back in London again. The mother-country does not hold him long at a time now."

"Do you think," mused Nora, frankly returning his gaze, "that Victoria Foster will marry Nuel?"

"Well, it depends just a little, I should say, on whether he asks her to do so. If he is sufficiently a poet, he will of course understand that, though love sought is very excellent and comfortable in its way, still that 'given unsought' it is far more precious. If you do not know *that*, Miss St. George," he added, presently, smiling a little because her eyes were lowered and he could not see them through their heavy fringe, "your year's study has indeed been of little use to you."

"To learn all that the poets tell us of love—not half of which they themselves could have believed—" put in Miss Archer, with an unaccountable tremor in her voice; "Nora would require Plato's year, Mr. Poynz."

"Even that I don't understand," said Nora, looking anxiously at Helen, with puckered brow

and tremulous lips. "Is Plato's year very long?"

"Only about twenty-six thousand ordinary years."

"That," said Nora, gravely, turning to Mark again as she spoke, "will show you how little I know."

"Not quite," opposed Mark, his voice now as grave as hers; "and I cannot bear to hear your self-dispraise. If you ever reach the depth of misery, my child, it will be when you can say, 'All I care to know I know.' When we remember that the very wisest and most learned sigh to think how little they can know at best, it ought to make us content to be always learning, not learned. There is no need to try hard for ever; it is often the best kind of knowledge which comes easiest. And do you know, Miss Nora, I think that Boileau never won such praise for his mighty intellect as is framed in those few words said of him by one who knew him—'He would speak ill of no one.'"

"But I," said Nora, sadly, "I speak ill of people often and often, especially of Genevieve Foster."

"Inexcusable!" commented Mark, shaking off his seriousness. "Miss Foster is only Turkish

enough to object to a brother near the throne. Do you know what is the message I bear to Mrs. Foster?"

"No," cried Nora, all interest at once. "Is it from Heaton?"

"Yes," replied Mark, trying to resist watching the effect of every word upon her. "Will and I want her to bring you all down to Heaton for a day, as our guests—Will's and mine. You have been in England a whole year, yet have never seen Will's home."

"No, and I thought I should stay there a great deal. But perhaps it was better not; I could never have worked industriously in the country—in Summer time. I suppose it is very beautiful there, Mr. Poyntz?"

"You will see."

"Perhaps," she said wistfully. "But perhaps I may not."

"But you must; I have something to show you, and to tell you there."

"Something that would not sound so well here?"

"Yes; it is the story of a beautiful house down there, and must be told on the spot."

"And Miss Archer?" began Nora, looking wistfully at the governess.

"Miss Archer is to have a special message from us both," replied Mark, with a smile for Helen. "As soon as ever the day is fixed, she will hear what a cordial invitation I bring her from Foster, and how anxiously I second it myself."

"And now, Mr. Poynz," Helen said, just as if she could not trust herself to answer him, "I hear unmistakable indications of Mrs. Foster's return."

When Mark, in his unhurried way, had bidden good-bye to Nora and Miss Archer, and ascended to the drawing-room, he found the ladies of the house resting after their drive, each with a cup of tea in her hand.

"Thomas did not tell me you were here," exclaimed Mrs. Foster, a little surprised (though she would not have confessed it) at his having voluntarily informed her how long he had waited for her. "I am very sorry to have detained you—very."

"You see we could not have expected you, because you have been away so long," added Genevieve, with great affability. "Will you be persuaded to have a cup of tea, Mr. Poynz? You must be very tired of this delay, and I

know you chafed at being obliged to wait so long."

"I have been very comfortable indeed," was Mark's reply.

"You were expecting us every minute, of course."

"I expected you eventually, Miss Foster, but hardly every minute, for I met you an hour ago. No—no tea, thank you."

"Met us!" echoed Victoria, wondering how they could have missed seeing him, while Genevieve stood angrily looking from the window, conscious that, instead of being ashamed of having waited in the schoolroom, he seemed even anxious that they should be distinctly informed that he had done so, and had felt it no penance. "Met us, Mr. Poyntz! Where?"

"'Far in the west,'" quoted Mark, "'remote from citizens, where Hyde Park ends and Bayswater begins.' You were speaking to a friend, or I might have stopped you. Mrs. Foster, I bring a message from Will, which I am here myself to indorse—I mean a joint invitation from him and myself. Will had a meeting to attend this evening, or he would, I believe, have been here too. Will you come and spend a day

at Heaton, in the park—and on the lake, if you like—finishing up the evening at Will's lodgings? I will drive you down; and back as far as Guildford, if you must return the same night. There will be moonlight too, if you will fix a day early in next week."

"Suppose," said Mrs. Foster, glancing nervously at her elder daughter, who, though gracefully joining her sister's pæan of delight, was waiting for her mother's reply, "we say the twenty-seventh, Mr. Poynz; will that suit you, and will it suit you, Gena?"

"On the twenty-seventh, mamma," Genevieve answered, reflectively, "we are engaged. Did you forget? Perhaps Mr. Poynz will let us say the twenty-ninth. It will be moonlight for our drive even then. How enjoyable it will be!"

"And this invitation, Mrs. Foster," Mark went on, "extends, if you please, to Miss St. George and Miss Archer."

"As for Miss Archer," put in Genevieve, with a laugh which was not overburdened with mirth, "that is one of Will's philanthropic ideas; and he would be much surprised, I'm sure, afterwards, if we, or you, Mr. Poynz, helped him to carry it out. And"—with a smile—"it would be cruel, too, to take her from Miss St. George,

who, I am confident, will not be tempted from her work. We never can persuade her to go with us anywhere—never. Can we, Tory?”

“May I try?” asked Mark, in the gravest possible manner, and not at all as if he knew of the merry twinkle in his eyes.

“I will do so,” interrupted Mrs. Foster, rising, and glancing at Genevieve for approval of the tact she displayed; “I will try to persuade her, if you will stay, Mr. Poynz. But she will not consent to go, I feel sure; for, though not naturally inclined to study, she keeps closely at it, under the conviction that she is doing right. And indeed I think she is—poor child!”

Just as Mrs. Foster reached the door, it was opened from without, and Nora entered the room, with an open letter in her hand.

“Mrs. Foster,” she said, without seeming to look farther into the room, “Mr. Doyle has written to say he will come for me on the twenty-ninth. The letter has just arrived, and you told me to let you know as soon as ever I heard from him. You said it would be the twenty-eighth, didn’t you? Does the change make it inconvenient?”

The last words were added simply in politeness, for she had not seen that Genevieve was

ill at ease, and dared not glance up to see whether Mr. Poynz had noticed what day they had *expected* to lose Nora.

"That will do very well," was Mrs. Foster's ready and half-whispered reply. "Now run away, my dear, and tell Miss Archer."

"I told her first," confessed Nora, honestly, but without intending to delay, until Mark's voice arrested her.

"Before Miss St. George goes, may we fix upon another day to spend in Surrey—one that will equally suit us all, Mrs. Foster? Have you any objection to promise me the twenty-eighth?"

"I am afraid," began Mrs. Foster, and looked to her daughter to finish the excuse.

"Yes, mamma, I'm afraid so too. You mean that we must go out to that tiresome old Mrs. Brunton's on the twenty-eighth."

"If that is so," said Mark, quietly, "and your engagements cannot be postponed, I must ask you to choose a later day, and to let me take Miss St. George and Miss Archer alone on the twenty-eighth; because after that they could not come at all."

"Of course," began Mrs. Foster, avoiding her

daughter's eyes, and feeling more uncomfortable than she ever remembered to have felt before, "I must consent to put off a personal engagement to chaperon the girl of whom I have taken voluntary charge. I would not neglect my duty in any particular ; but I am extremely doubtful, Mr. Poynz, as to whether her legal guardian would consent to such a distraction on her last day. Otherwise——"

"I will telegraph to Doyle with pleasure. That will be no trouble, and I shall have his answer in a few hours."

"He will think us mad!" exclaimed Genevieve, smiling stiffly in her effort to conceal her intense chagrin. "Mamma, you would not feel that incumbent upon you just for this once, would you? You will try to forget those scruples of yours that people call so wise and kind, and insist on Nora's taking this holiday. We will all insist upon it, Mr. Poynz, and we will all beg Miss Archer to come too. Tory, you will join mamma and me, won't you? And we will make a polite excuse to Mrs. Brunton, and be ready for you on the twenty-eighth, Mr. Poynz. It will be a delightful day, I am sure, for us all."

"Your concession gives me the greatest pleasure," said Mark cordially, "and Willoughby's will be equal to my own. Then I will call for you quite early. Nine o'clock, may I say?"

CHAPTER II.

"I were but little happy if I could say how much."

THE morning of the 28th of April was so fair a one, that it even rose brightly above the grimy roofs in Great Cumberland Place. So fair that it looked with a sunny smile even through the dim window of that sitting-room of Helen Archer's, in Randolph Road, Kilburn. So fair, that it was just as it should be, for the dawn of that impossible day which had lived all night in Nora's dreams. And, as she dressed—donning a few stray items of girlish finery which relieved the sombre blackness of the well-worn dress, and going constantly to the windows to look up, she sang softly to herself in the gladness of her heart.

Once or twice, during their hasty breakfast, she caught Genevieve Foster looking at her in a curious new way, as much inquisitive as contemptuous; and this, with the old repellent coldness of Miss Foster's manner, made her shrink within herself more than ever, and linger close to Helen Archer, when they were all summoned to start, and Mr. Poynz had drawn up his four horses at the door.

Nora's breath came in a gasp as she looked out. The handsome drag, with its high, cushioned seats, the shining of the silver on the harness, the liveried servants, Mr. Poynz sitting so still with that dangerous collection of reins in his hand, and, above all, the four restive horses with their glossy coats and arched necks, filled Nora with a wonder of happiness which actually benumbed her, as pain might have done.

"Of course it is all very new to you," commented Miss Foster, pausing for a few moments beside her, and speaking very pointedly; "but I hope you will not show this fact before the servants. They will think you have lived your life in a desert, if you express any surprise; for, deaf and dumb as they may look, they will hear every word uttered on the drag."

"Will they?" questioned Nora, as she tried to realise that the gentleman who owned these splendid horses, and did not look afraid of driving them all at once, was the one who had driven Borak across the bog a year before, and had expressed himself so capable of appreciating Borak's speed. "How unpleasant for them! Won't they be able to think of anything else?"

This barbarous idea was below even the *con-tempt* of a civilised member of civilised society, and so Miss Foster turned away and left Nora to her wonder—a wonder which, before she had been seated many minutes behind the fleet high-stepping bays, had grown to a pleasure so exquisite that its outlook made her eyes lovely as a picture.

What a drive that was! Nora, sitting with her hands folded in her lap, looked from her height and wondered whether those she met *could* know what a very lovely world it was.

Without giving any reason for his choice of route, Mr. Poyntz drove round through Kew and Richmond, and, though he rarely addressed Nora when she sat so utterly silent in the intensity of enjoyment, he still had ever an answer ready for each of those breathless questions of hers—an answer which taught her

something of the spots they passed, while it seemed only idle Summer chat. And when, so often, a few words of hers betrayed unconsciously the knowledge she had hungrily gleaned and thoughtfully garnered, of this neighbourhood which, month by month, she had been expecting to see; he gave no sign of his surprise, for that swift pleasant smile in his eyes would—even if they had seen it—have been misunderstood by the two girls who sat nearer to him, entertaining him with familiar allusions to the owners of the mansions and villas they passed. Both so complacently cognisant of the fact that their style of occupying their seats—leaning back just a trifle, without turning their heads, and allowing the pedestrian world to pass unseen *very* much below them—must give incalculable satisfaction to one who, like Mr. Poynz, understood so well that unequivocal stamp of lofty society which the uninitiated could not counterfeit.

Through Kew to Richmond, crossing the park; just as if Nora must see that her fairy world was as beautiful as she had imagined it; speeding past rippled meadows, where even the shadows were beautiful, as they glided softly after the sunbeams, giving the crowd of

golden buttercups their swift coy kiss, before they crossed the river, and left the sun-rays there like Nature's own sweet smile.

Through the long street of Kingston, while across the river Mark pointed out the tops of the chestnut-trees of Bushey Park, and a glimpse of the old red walls of Hampton Court. And now at every turn the river seemed to grow more beautiful, with the sunlight slanting daintily among its tiny islands. Driving smoothly, almost at the water's edge, to Esher; and then in and out amid giant trees, and dreamy dusky parks; where here and there little clusters of bluebells lay in the openings among the trees, as if the Summer grass could even reflect one bright glimpse of the blue Summer sky.

On and on; while Nora sat with clasped hands and happy eyes, living to the full this wonderful day.

"You look," observed Miss Foster, just slightly turning from Nora a ring of glossy plaits, and substituting for it a profile and the sweep of a long white feather, "as if you wanted to get down and gather flowers by the roadside. Now confess that you would really rather be walking, or idling about. You have admired everything

except your luxurious seat. You would give it up willingly if you might wander in the fields at large, would you not?"

"I would rather be just here. There is no place in all the world where I would like to be so well as here. If I were not, how could I *know* how exquisite it all is?"

"Frank, at any rate," murmured Miss Foster, moving her tiny lace parasol a little on one side, that she might see how Mr. Poyntz received this avowal, and very glad to find it had not made the slightest impression upon him.

"This sun is almost like the sun of June," he said, without looking round; "do not let me interfere with your shade."

So Genevieve, with a little forced laugh, lowered the dainty parasol again, marvelling to see Nora push back her shabby little Winter hat, and let the sun revel in her eyes, and play as it would on her soft smooth skin.

On and on; through meadows lying in great waves between them and the distant hills; through a wondrous, living picture of wood and water and rich pasture-lands; past silent mansions, lying proudly back among giant trees, between which (so thinly clad on this April day) Nora could now and then see figures

moving, and could wonder over them, and build romances round them in that useless way of hers; past scattered farms, from which the mellow lowing of the cattle made a fitting music for the Spring morning, and from which now and then a figure came to the gateway, and, with shaded eyes, watched the carriage on its smooth, swift way; past homely roadside cottages, with warm, sweet borderings of tulip and ranunculus in their gardens, and narrow golden lines of crocus, over which crept lovingly the perfume of the sturdy wallflower, standing behind in sober richness of brown and amber.

Presently the houses stood more thickly on the margin of road, then clustered about a long green, across which the horses sped among a few scattered, watching figures. And then the last country town was past, Mark said, and they would soon be in Guildford.

Not to stop, though! They drove through it, with only a passing glance at the High Street of the quiet, pretty, quaint old town, with its grim red hospital, its over-arching gables and carved doorways; and with only a distant, momentary view of the narrow tardy river, and the grim, demolished castle, which

they thought beautiful only because it stood so bravely in its solitude against the steady, constant stroke of Time. Then they turned eastward from the town, and rolled on, down sheltered lanes and across a baby river, to such a sweet and tranquil valley that it seemed as if that world of London which they had left in the morning must be in another hemisphere. And there, before them when they stopped, was an old gabled house, standing broad and low on a lawn of smoothest, brightest turf; and from the gate came Willoughby Foster, running like a boy to welcome them, and very ruddily conscious of his error the moment he found himself attempting to reach Nora first of all.

And this was Will's home—this pretty farmhouse, with the hills rising behind it, and flowers in every window!

"At present it is," he said, smiling, in answer to Nora's question, as her eyes wandered over the calm and peaceful scene. "I shall stay here until some one makes a happier and better home for me, Nora."

"One hardly could," she commented, absently.

"You like it, then?" he queried, with great

eagerness. "You like it better than London, Nora?"

"I don't know, because I don't know London yet."

His face fell; he had been so sure that her eyes were filled with delight and admiration for this valley where he lived and worked.

"I shall not stay here for ever, of course," he added, a little ruefully; "I'm as likely to live in London as anywhere, when old Keston comes home and gives away this living."

He was called from her before he had won an answer to this cheering remark, and then the horses were led away, the wraps deposited in Will's rooms, and the little party set out for the spot where they were to dine, and where Mr. Foster had invited other guests to meet them.

"Because you see," he explained to his mother, "as I visit so much, and cannot ask ladies to my own house, I'm glad of such an opportunity as this to wipe off a mass of obligations."

And somehow every one of them, though with diverse motives, felt relieved that their party was to be increased by, and leavened with, a foreign element.

"After dinner," Will said to Nora, keeping

beside her and Miss Archer, though he had his mother on his arm, "I will show you the little church in the park, where I preach, and the pretty private walk from it to the house. You will be charmed, Nora."

"I'm sure I shall. Is this," she asked, as they passed under a wide stone arch where the double iron gates had been fastened open, "the park you mean, Mr. Foster?"—It was easy enough to Nora now to call her old playfellow by his surname, for during a whole year he had been spoken of to her by no other.

"Yes, this is old Keston's place. Isn't it magnificent? Though of course we want Summer to see it in all its splendour."

"Where is the house?"

"Oh! we are not near it. We must turn down this side avenue now, and go to the Gothic house on the western borders of the park, where we meet our friends and lunch."

In the pretty building, where two men were laying dishes and wines upon a long table, quite a little crowd had assembled. They were chiefly girls, laughing light-heartedly; but there was a fair sprinkling, too, of the sterner sex, with here and there a matron, and one of those smiling, helpful single women

who, in every parish under the sun, are to be found willing to devote themselves to parish matters. The liveliness of this group—as well as their expectation—ceased suddenly when the curate brought his friends among them; and, if they had much to learn from the London fashions of his mother and sisters, they had still more to marvel over in the rare beauty of that one friend of his who had come in her Winter dress, and a little damaged velvet cap, which could not certainly be the mode in London now. But, when this girl—after Mr. Foster's introduction—seemed to make herself, quite suddenly, and in the prettiest and gentlest way, at home among them, and had so much to say in that low, sweet voice of hers, it was little wonder that they made a group around her as she stood against the verandah talking of the view. Or that they followed her when she wandered away among the trees, darting here and there after the shy wood-blossoms, or sitting recklessly upon a fence, to question them about the curious old Baron who owned this noble park, and yet could live away from it.

“Can you imagine,” said Will, singling Mr. Poyntz from a group, when the table was

spread, and the two liveried servants who had come down on the drag were ready to cover all deficiencies in Will's recruits, "where Nora is?"

"Of course I can imagine," returned Mark, with a smile, "but I do not know."

"I hope she has not wandered off to see the church," Will went on, full of one desire.

"I hope not. You must show her that yourself, Foster, for——"

But Mark did not finish the thought aloud. He only resolved in his own mind that Will should have an opportunity during this day to tell Nora of that hope which made his face beam now at the very thought of her proximity.

What a dinner it was! For, though Will's sisters were not the only ones who called it luncheon, all knew it would be their chief meal that day, and that the most alluring dinner ever served could not follow it with any relish. The young curate looked happy as a king at his end of the long table, and his mother—wholly under his influence just now—beamed like a feminine, and somewhat more staid, reflection of him. Nora, still keeping beside Miss Archer, and talking chiefly to her—

not in any shyness of her own, but because so few others noticed the governess's presence,—looked unconscious defiance at Genevieve Foster's few keen thrusts ; and never once seemed to see those surprised glances with which the sisters invariably received any remark of hers which excited attention or elicited a laugh.

When the meal was over and the party dispersing, Mr. Poynz came up to Nora, as she stood by one of the tiny arched windows of the long room.

"Miss St. George," he said, "will you come with me for a few minutes? I want to show you the lake. They will all be down there presently, and," he added, following the direction of her eyes, "Miss Archer has been taken possession of, you see, by that pleasant old lady with the grey curls. Come."

They went, talking merrily the while, across a wide and sunny stretch of grass, and then up a little wooded knoll. But when they reached the top of this, and Mark said, "There's the lake," they stood quite still to look down upon it. It lay on their right, in the hollow beyond this rising ground ; and on their left, facing the water, stood a silent, uninhabited house—a long, lofty building of grey stone, with pointed

arches over every door and window, and a tall tower at each corner.

Nora's eyes went back again down the gentle slope to the water, and then to the house again. Then once more to the lake shore, fastening themselves there upon a low, closed boat-house, the flat leaden roof of which caught the sun-rays and held them hotly. Then the girl's gaze, growing more thoughtful and puzzled, slowly traced the path from this little boat-house to one wide, low window, opening like a door, in the tower nearest the lake, upon the eastern side of the house.

"I feel as if I had seen all this before," she said, "yet of course that is impossible."

"Unless you have seen it in a picture."

"A picture!" she echoed, thoughtfully. "How, and where, could I have seen it in a picture?"

"I will tell you," Mark said, gently. "I have brought you here on purpose to tell you."

So, in that very spot where the sketch was taken, which he had seen in Mrs. Corr's Irish cabin, he told Nora the story Rachael had narrated to him a year before.

CHAPTER III.

If he lived,
She knew not that he lived ; if he were dead,
She knew not he was dead.

MOORE.

“EVERYTHING seems different now, Mr. Poynz. The house and the park and the lake have all the shadow of that sad story on them.”

“That shadow will soon be dispersed for you,” said Mark, smiling into the eyes which had so slowly saddened while he spoke. “This happened so long ago that its memory cannot sadden to-day. I should not have told it to you if I had thought it could—at least, I hope I should not.”

“I can recognize it easily now,” said Nora, looking round the park, as they stood on that spot beside the lake to which the footprints in

the snow had been traced on that night of which he had been telling her. "The sketch was surely taken from just here. How surprised you must have been, Mr. Poynz, when you saw it in Rachael's kitchen!"

"Greatly surprised," he acknowledged, smiling a little, though her gaze was far from his face. "Yet, except in a few particulars, the story Mrs. Corr told me that night had been long familiar to me."

"And here," said Nora, thoughtfully, looking down upon the grass at their feet, "the ground was torn, you say, and they knew he had struggled for his life?"

"There were the marks of a struggle here; and the snow was trampled, and the roots torn."

Then Nora's eyes went slowly round the lake, as she asked the question Mr. Poynz had put to Rachael, and which had been asked so many times in that long-ago of which they had been talking:

"Is it quite impossible that anyone could have escaped by swimming?"

Mark looked round too, not seeking for an answer, but simply from force of habit, as he followed out one old long thought.

"All round the lake," he said, "the snow lay

deep and undisturbed. Except in this spot, no foot had touched it."

"Then he must lie there now," said Nóra, looking down on the sunlit water. "He—— But you have not told me his name, Mr. Poynz. I suppose he was Lord Keston too, as this is Lord Keston's house."

"Hardly; but the title was on its way to him when he eluded it."

"Do you know, Mr. Poynz," said Nora, glancing frankly up into his face, "you speak almost as if you fancied he was not dead—was not even guilty?"

"Do I?" questioned Mark; but she could not tell whether his voice was stirred by pleasure or annoyance. "Yes, I have that fancy often—even on this very spot."

"But how," asked Nora, deep in thought. "How could it be? I have tried to think, while you were telling me, if there could be another way; and it seems as if there could not."

"Yes, it seems," Mark answered, in his straightforward, resolute way; "but the truth, whatever it may be, is beyond the *seeming*, and I am going to reach it."

"Wasn't it many years ago?" asked Nora, still looking wonderingly up into his face.

"Yes, many years ago—the lifetime of a girl like you."

"And, Mr. Poynz, has no one ever before doubted Lord Keston's guilt or his death?"

"No, I believe not. How could they?"

"And yet you do?"

"Yes, I do. And against the utter certainty of guilt and death, which these silent eighteen years have all the more firmly rooted, I alone raise my hands."

"Perhaps," said Nora, gently, "such certainty may be—like Fear Castle—'weak enough, in every part, to melt before the strong man's eyes and fly the true of heart.'"

A little pause followed her words, while she looked across the lake, and saw nothing of that quiet gladness in her companion's face, which betrayed that she had received his words exactly as he had expected her to do.

"Mr. Poynz," she said, presently, as they turned from the boat-house towards the Hall, avoiding the gravelled path, and walking slowly on the grass, "does the—the murder that was committed in that quiet house so long ago, dishonour the title, now that another man bears it?"

"Yes," Mark replied, full gravely; "old as it

is, this stain upon the title robs it of all worth. But it may be cleared some day, and that old house may be flooded with the sweetest sunshine heaven can pour on earth. Think of what a home it might be—can you?”

“Yes, it is very beautiful,” Nora said, musing over some new intensity in Mark’s voice. “I wonder why Lord Keston doesn’t live here.”

“It is rather unnecessarily roomy for one solitary man,” said Mark, with his quizzical eyes upon the wide grey building before them.

“Is Lord Keston a solitary man?”

“Yes.”

“Where is he now?”

“He is in Florence, I believe.”

“You know him, I suppose, Mr. Poyntz?” interrogated Nora—and in that moment she wondered for the first time why he had brought her there and told her such a sad story.

“Yes, I know him,” Mark answered; “and, knowing him, I quite understand why he avoids this splendid desolate old mansion. He has a small luxurious villa on the Arno’s bank, and only very rarely does he come to Heaton.”

“Does he—” began Nora, and then she paused involuntarily and momentarily—“does *he* be-

lieve what you believe about that other night so many years ago?"

"I have never asked him, Miss St. George."

"How strange! I wonder what made you first begin to believe it yourself, Mr. Poynz. Can you remember?"

"Oh! very well," he answered, laughing. "When we go over that empty house together, I will show you where, and why, the idea first came to me."

"When shall we go over it?" inquired Nora, eagerly.

"Next time you are here."

"Oh! but that will never be!" she sighed, illogically. "My English year is over now, Mr. Poynz, and I am going back to Ireland. Did you not know?"

"I know," returned Mark, curtly, "that the year's study is over; but why could you not stay here? Why do you rush back to the Irish?"

"They were kinder. I mean," the girl added, correcting herself, while the rich shy colour rose in her cheeks, "that I know them better."

"I am English."

"But then you don't want a governess, Mr. Poynz."

"Doubtful. But I don't believe you are tempted back by your search for some one in want of a governess. My firm conviction is that you cannot exist longer without a sight of Borak."

She glanced up, her eyes radiant in their delight.

"I'm so glad! I was afraid you had forgotten, and I did so hope you wouldn't forget Borak."

"What did you think me? Why, Miss Nora, on the only verdant spot in all my sterile expanse of memory stands Borak, with every corner highly developed."

"He *was* rather full of corners," acquiesced Nora, ruefully; "but I am just as fond of him as if he were like—— I hope he will never see *your* horses, Mr. Poynz; they would make him feel so dejected."

"Not one of them," said Mark, decisively, "could ever take us two across the bog as Borak did; and in another day or two, Miss St. George, we will have just such another drive."

"Another!" echoed Nora, her eyes wistful a little in their astonishment. "I shall be in Ireland, alone; and—and Borak is yours now, Mr. Poynz."

"I know it, and I am going to enjoy him on the bog at Traveere."

"You going to Traveere, Mr. Poynz! Oh! not really?" The words were scarcely more than whispered, yet he saw how beautiful her eyes were in that sudden gladness. But he only asked, in his leisurely way, if there were any law in Ireland to prevent a man's living on his own estate, when he thought fit.

"Mr. Poynz"—a long pause had followed his unanswered question, and Nora's tone revealed how full of pondering the silence had been—"you cannot stay at Traveere. Don't you remember how ruined and comfortless and melancholy it was?"

"I remember; but I remember something else, which you have probably forgotten. Once upon a time a common mallow on the roadside was touched by Mahomet's garment as he passed, and it changed at once into an exquisite geranium, and—best of all—has been a geranium ever since."

"I'm afraid," said Nora, laughing, "that Mahomet hasn't passed Traveere since I have been away, and made it beautiful."

"No—not since you have been away."

"Poor old Traveere!" sighed Nora, standing

for a few moments to gaze round upon the scene—the sweep of park, and the solemn, silent house, with its wide terraces and lofty turreted walls. “Think of the contrast between this house now, and Traveere when you saw it, Mr. Poynz.”

“When I do, this solitary place fares worse in my mind,” said Mark. “But, when I fancy Traveere as it is now, and this house as it may be some day, ‘blaz’d with lights and bray’d with minstrelsy,’ and in every room the fairy brightness of——”

“Yes, Mr. Poynz—of *what* were you going to say?”

“Gas, perhaps. Can you fancy it?”

“I can fancy any happiness in such a spot as this,” Nora said, but her tones were only full of a present happiness; not a fancied one at all.

“Even remembering,” observed Mark, looking quizzically down upon her as they still stood between the lake and the house, “‘golde all is not that doth golden seeme.’”

“Does that signify? If it ‘seema,’ we can enjoy the seeming so very much.”

“You will, I trust, have much more, Miss St. George, than the seeming to enjoy through life——”

"And you, Mr. Poynz?" asked Nora, looking up surprised, when his words ceased so abruptly. "Is your home like this?"

"Not exactly. Should you care to see my home? If so I must drive you past it this evening. I have no right to inherit it quite yet, though, for no man can come to roost in his quarters there until he is 'fifty years of age and unmarried.'"

Nora's laugh rang out as merrily as a child's.

"It is always hard at first," she said, "to tell whether you are joking or in earnest, Mr. Poynz. Miss Archer said this morning that my motto ought to be those lines of Hood's—

'I do enjoy this bounteous, beauteous earth,
And dote upon a jest.'

But I think it ought to be yours."

"Only sometimes," said Mark, hurriedly, as they turned their backs upon Heaton Place, and went on through the park; "but *you* are happy always—even in that musty schoolroom at Great Cumberland Place."

"I've never been very fond of that schoolroom," confessed Nora, sighing, though her eyes were full of fun. "I think 'a sense of *history* the spirit daunted.' Still," she added,

with a resolute little shake of the head, "I never could have worked and studied properly and industriously here, so it is better as it is. Life *must* have been a holiday here. Now don't you think, Mr. Poynz, that Mr. Foster is just as happy as he can be?"

"Unless he wants something that he has not."

"But he has everything," rejoined Nora, her eyebrows raised just a little.

"Oh, everything," assented Mark, promptly; "even the prettiest pasture-land under the sun, and the tamest and meekest of flocks! Lucky Will! I've known the soldiers of the Cross to have a mutinous regiment under their command; I've known our spiritual pastors to have only evil spirits to exorcise, and our masters to be set by fate in a school of riotous insurgents. But Will is simply the shepherd among his yielding, obedient sheep. A happy fellow, is he? Then what if he covets one lamb from another fold? Is not any unsatisfied desire just the one drop which turns the whole sweet draught to bitterness?"

"But Mr. Foster could not covet another clergyman's parish, I think," said Nora, wondering why Mr. Poynz did not laugh at the

idea, instead of being so very unnecessarily grave. "I think no people could be fonder of their curate than these ladies are of Mr. Foster. Did you not notice it, Mr. Poynz?"

"I will notice now," promised Mark, with a laugh in his eyes. "After we join the group again, I will devote myself to noticing that—and nothing more. There, Miss St. George. That is the last glimpse we shall have of the lake. Pretty, is it not, with the swans floating so daintily over the gleams of sunlight?"

No answer came from Nora, as she stood looking back upon the water, and Mark repeated his question.

"Do you think it pretty, Miss St. George?"

"Pretty, yes," she said, with an involuntary little shiver; "but I was thinking of what might lie below, and yet trying to hope there was no death here—as you are hoping. Mr. Poynz," she added, still more reflectively, "I have only just remembered that, if Lord Keston did not give that poison, it must have been his cousin—didn't you say she was his cousin? You called her sometimes Kate, and sometimes Miss Giffard. It is more terrible still to think of its having been a girl."

"Far more terrible," he assented, quietly, as

they walked on again. "I want you to come with me to see Miss Giffard. It will be a clearer answer to your misgiving than any I can give."

They walked for a time in silence after that, Nora wondering why Mr. Poynz should have proposed this, and wondering still more why it was that she felt such deep, real interest in the story he had told her of Heaton Place.

Presently, leaving the open park, they passed through a fir-wood, where the bare trees stretched like a boundless vista of columns. Then they came out again into a sheltered little valley on the outskirts of the park, where a low white house lay safe from every eastern breath, and where the buds of a drooping willow on the lawn shone like emeralds against the dark and sombre green of the yews. Instead of walking up the lawn, Mark led Nora to the side of the house, and opened a narrow gate among the yews. She started a little as she entered the path to which it led her—a path cut among them.

"How cool and dim!" she said. "It is like sudden twilight."

"It is always twilight here," Mark answered, bending his head a little as he walked under

the arched yews ; " and another surprise awaits you at the end. This little avenue leads into such a sheltered yet sunny nook of the garden, that I have known all kinds of Summer flowers standing there in blossom before January has left us. See !"

But, though the flowers were dazzling in the little parterre to which their walk had suddenly opened, it was not their brilliance which had fixed Nora's astonished gaze ; and, though in the next minute she was standing before a bed of blooming verbenas, it was only to offer her hand to a young man who was busily pegging down the plants.

" Micky !" she cried. " Just think of its being you, Micky !"

The lad had started to his feet as if her pretty pleasant greeting had struck him, and his cheeks were aflame when he saw her offered hand.

" No, Miss Nora," he said, taking his cap off. " You wurr our fairy princess over at home, an' it wurrn't annythin' you cud do cud make the difference, but it's not in Oireland we are now. I'm so—it's good it is to see yer face agin, Miss Nora."

" And it is good to see you, Micky," the girl responded, warmly ; " and you look so well and

so prosperous, and are growing quite a man; isn't he, Mr. Poynz?"

"Quite," agreed Mark, with a smile for the lad who sought the smile so timidly. "This is a rare spot for all uncertain plants; isn't it, Corr?"

"I on'y haven't wurrk enough, Miss Nora," Micky said, unable to keep his eyes from the face which was so sweet and so familiar to him. "Me place is too easy an' too good for me—an' it's such a kind misthress Mr. Poynz give me. Oh, Miss Nora, it's happy as the day I shud be if I wurr shure all wurr roight at home!"

"Tell me of home, Micky."

"But it's so long since I wurr there, Miss Nora dear," said Micky, dropping more deeply into the brogue he was trying to lose. "I on'y remimber how it wurr missin' ye we wurr day afther day. Mother doesn't wroite to me very often, on'y whin there's somethin' good to tell."

"And Shan?"

Micky's eyes went down to the plants at his feet, and then up, swiftly and suddenly, into Mr. Poynz's face, before he answered Nora, with a nervous effort,

"Yes, Miss Nora, Shan's—quoinite well."

"I shall see them all in another day or two,

Micky," Nora said. "I am so glad to have met you before I go. I can describe it all to Rachael."

"You're really goin' thin, Miss Nora?"

"Really," smiled Nora; and her voice had no note of fear or apprehension in it.

They stayed a few minutes longer talking to the Irish lad, and then Mr. Poynz led Nora up to the house, just as one of the low windows was opened, and a lady came slowly out—a tall, fragile-looking lady of about forty years, in a mourning-dress, and with a snowy shawl around her shoulders, and a matronly cap upon her soft fair hair. She met Mark with a smile of real gladness, but the quiet dreamy gaze which Nora had noticed first upon her face, had returned to it by the time Mr. Poynz had introduced her.

"Miss St. George!" she repeated, as she gave the girl her thin soft hand, and then seemed inclined to leave it in Nora's clasp. "Did you say so, Mr. Poynz?"

"Nora St. George," Mark answered, intercepting Nora's own reply. "Is the name not quite strange to you?"

"Not quite." The answer was given slowly and thoughtfully, but the quiet, grave eyes

brightened with momentary eagerness, and a flash of colour glided, as it were, across the pale still face. "You have seen my garden," she added, gently and almost shyly laying her fingers on Nora's arm; "will you come and see my pictures—if Mr. Poynz will spare you?"

There was little need for the wistful glance into Mark's face. He wanted a stroll round the garden, he said in his easy way, and would join them in a few minutes. But the few minutes grew to thirty, before Miss Giffard and Nora came out to the lawn.

"Thank you," the elder lady said quite simply, when Mark, bidding her good-bye, looked a little keenly from her face to Nora's.

"Mr. Poynz," observed Nora, thoughtfully walking at his side from the garden gate, "Miss Giffard is just what I fancied her while you told the story."

"And you do not think that she——"

"Oh, no!" cried the girl, intercepting his question with a shudder. "It could not have been, Mr. Poynz. It *could* not."

"And she showed you her pictures," interrogated Mark. "Her own paintings, I suppose?"

"Yes; many of them. How fond she must be of painting! She showed me only the

landscapes, though. There were several figure-sketches—not framed, but in a portfolio—but she hurried past those, and showed me only the views. She was so kind to me, Mr. Poynz,” Nora added, with an earnestness which told that kindness, even though it visited her life in such rare gleams, fell on a grateful soil.

“I should not wonder. See, there is Will, looking among the trees for us, or our remains—yet it is barely an hour since we left him.”

The tone was quick, and almost angry in the last few words, and Nora noticed it, while at that moment Mr. Foster caught sight of them, and waved his hat, with a call. One minute afterwards she was walking at the young curate's side, and Mark, who had so lightly given up his charge to his friend, had joined another group, determined that this friend should be missed as little as possible.

the pleasantest visit you could pay. Doesn't she like clergymen?"

"Not particularly," laughed Will. "Still I do not mean that she dislikes me, or has me turned out; but I am painfully conscious of being kept outside her confidence. I go round and round the enclosure, and try every weak point, but I never even so much as see within. Sometimes," concluded Will, in his simple, unsuspicious way, "I am almost jealous of the Caliph, because I feel sure he has been within, and that it comforts her to lead him there."

"She seems rather lonely," Nora said, her eyes very thoughtful, as she walked on among the shadows.

"Lonely? Yes, indeed, and isolated too, which makes all the difference. Now the Caliph is lonely enough, in my opinion, but never isolated. You understand the difference, Nora?"

"I—think so. Is that your church?"

"Yes. Ah! Nora dear, how long I have looked forward to bringing you here! This is the happiest day I have spent at Heaton."

"Have you spent it already, then? I haven't."

"But really, Nora, do listen. I am speaking the simple truth, not merely paying you a compliment."

"Of course not," said Nora, demurely, as her eyes wandered over the old building. "As a compliment is a pretty way of saying what you mean, I knew that wasn't a compliment."

"But, Nora," pleaded Will, as, hat in hand, he held open the low arched door, "it is such a joy to me to see that you like Heaton. I always feel quite different here from what I do in London. I feel myself here," he went on, pleased to see that Nora had turned to him with her eyes full of questioning sympathy, "a man who has his work to do, and can do it. There I am but one unit in an endless line of figures, and I'm conscious there that my life can be of little use either to myself or to others."

"Then I expect," said Nora—and now her eyes had left his face and were slowly taking in the quaint features of the old building—"you have, like myself, seen London wrongly. I know I oftenest think what pleasures it holds, and how I might enjoy such pleasures, but I

can feel too that it *may* be *there* I shall do my life's work."

"Not," exclaimed Will, confidently, "unless you choose it, Nora; and I think you will not choose it. Though it is all very well to see the world now and then, one soon gets too much of it, and likes to forget it, in travel or in retirement with those we love. You think so, don't you, dear?"

"I think," she answered, gravely, "that somewhere it is said, 'He hath set the world in their heart'; and don't you think it may mean—but don't let us talk of this. It must be so much easier to *escape* the world than to overcome it. What a curious old church! Is it always as dim as this?"

"Yes, until we light those candles in the sconces—don't they remind you of Traveere, Nora?—and even then no one could read a fashionable prayer-book in these high-walled pews. There I stand behind that great carved screen, and can see nobody. I could scarcely recognise even you, if you were here, Nora."

"I would make myself recognised," she said, with a smile—for she never guessed what her next visit to the little church should be. "It would be of no use for us to come here

to study each other's bonnets, would it?"

They returned to the porch presently, and Nora stood near one of the shadowy seats to look down the incline before them, while Will talked on, too much delighted at having her there to waste a moment in silence.

"You may judge of the innocence and simplicity of the place, Nora, when I tell you that, on a rainy afternoon, my congregation—the ladies, at any rate—leave their cloaks and umbrellas out here in the porch all through the service, and nothing has ever been missed. Are we not honest and unsuspecting?"

"Yes."

Nora's eyes had come back from the distant scene, and were taking in the fact that, under one old grey stone near her lay "Kerryline Bbrougger, oo dyde ov the krewill yewsidge ov ur usbun."

"And, Nora, my parishioners are such pleasant, friendly people. You have seen some of them to-day, and they are all just as sociable."

"Did you know Kerryline Bbrougger's usbun?" inquired Nora, in his meaning pause.

"Nora, do listen!" entreated Will. "I can see they all admire you greatly, and are disposed to welcome you. I heard old Mrs. Henley say

you were lovely ; and—— Nora, where are you going ?”

“I wonder,” said Nora, because he had hurried up, and stopped her at the churchyard-gate, “why Kerryline Bbrougger’s usbun let that stone be put up. Such meekness doesn’t look like krewill yewsidge, does it ?”

“Do listen to me one minute, Nora,” persisted Will, closing the gate behind them. “I do so want to win your promise. I really believe you have never yet thought seriously of marriage.”

“Oh, indeed I have !” said Nora, with a look round, as if she would learn her bearings with a view to escape. “I have just been thinking, most seriously, what an unfortunate thing it was for Kerryline Bbrougger.”

“But—but,” panted Will, desperately, “I mean for yourself, Nora. And I am sure no husband in the world would be so——”

But even hopeful Will could not afford to waste his earnest hints upon the desert air ; and as Nora was by this time twenty yards away, speeding down the shadowy avenue, he let his breathless entreaty melt into an irrepressible smile, and started in pursuit. Ten minutes afterwards Genevieve Foster, walking towards

her brother's lodgings, where the scattered groups were assembling for tea, called Mr. Poynz's attention to the two, as they came up laughing and breathless.

"How sweetly refreshing it is," she said, in her deliberate, sibilant way, "to see a school-girl out for a holiday! I believe she thinks at such times that the world was created for herself alone. Well, the thought is pleasant of course to her, and does no one else any harm."

"No, no harm," acquiesced Mark, placidly. But he looked away rather quickly from Nora's daintily flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

Tea was taken in the pretty ivy-covered farm-house, one corner of which the curate called his home; and it was well that the two narrow old glass doors which served as windows could be set wide open in the balmy early evening, for the merry voices and the ready laughter could not be bounded by the low-ceiled room, and must have found *some* vent out into the wide, quiet scene beyond. Then Will's new cottage-piano was opened, and one after another of the guests was asked to sing or play; while those who were not asked looked on indifferently—regretfully perhaps when the

universal request interrupted a pleasant *tête-à-tête*. But to Nora this was no wasted time, only one of the bits of colouring which formed the exquisite mosaic of the day. She smiled a little when Will Foster, in the full enjoyment of his position as host, his face beaming and his white ringed hands lively upon the keys, burst out jovially with the assertion that he was "*Homeless, ragged, and tanned*;" and her face was quizzical and rather wondering while one after another of the lady-guests took her seat and carolled fearlessly; but her eyes grew very grave and dreamy when Mr. Poynz sang "*Total Eclipse*."

"Nora," whispered Helen Archer, her cheeks still flushed, when she left the piano and joined her pupil, "wasn't it good of Mr. Poynz to ask me to play his accompaniment? Who else would have singled me out, just because no one had proposed *my* playing or singing?"

"He—he is not like the others," Nora said, very quietly.

"Now, Nora," pleaded Will, even while his younger sister was playing, "do sing us something. I want them all to hear you."

"Hush!" entreated Nora, with the utmost gravity. "Have some sympathy with Poor

Mary Ann's struggles to make herself intelligible through that running fire of demi-semi-quavers."

"Miss Archer, use your influence," persisted Mr. Foster. "A bird who can sing and won't sing—you know the rest, Nora."

"I don't think it is of any use to ask," said Helen, quietly. For she fully understood Nora's refusal, when she saw how persistently Mrs. Foster—who stood on this occasion in the character of hostess—ignored the request when made to Nora, and how dexterously the two sisters of the host turned aside the proposal as it passed them.

"It is too bad!" he complained. "Poynz, do persuade Nora to sing to us. It is all very well for her to be so modest, but she ought to know that she has an exquisite voice, and is more musical——"

"*Most* musical, you mean," quoted Nora, with plaintive emphasis, "and so, of course, *most* melan-choly. Mr. Poynz can see both facts."

"Plainly," assented Mark; "and both are gifts to be cultivated, Miss St George. How easily I can fancy you singing 'I would not, if I could, be gay.'"

"Mr. Poynz," put in Miss Foster, from the

piano, where she stood turning over her brother's heterogeneous collection of songs and chants, "here is 'Nazareth.' Pray remember that it is a favourite of mine."

Nora never quite understood why this request—declined so quietly and politely—should have put an end to the music; nor how it happened that Mr. Poynz, who had looked so stern during Miss Foster's urgent importunity, should in another minute be moving the piano, and preparing the room for an impromptu dance.

"I'm so glad," whispered Nora to Miss Archer, with a long-drawn breath of relief. "It is so hard to sit quite still to-day."

"You will not sit much now, dear," said Helen, with a smile; and then at a sign from Miss Foster she took her seat at the piano, and gently and prettily (in correct time, but with an occasional defective chord) played through the opening figure of the Lancers, as a signal to the company.

"Poynz," whispered the young curate, his face radiant after his first dance with Nora, "I want your opinion of Nora's dancing. Of course you saw her. What did you think?"

"Simply," returned Mark, while young Foster was too full of delight to detect the passing

glance or tone of disdain, "that Sir John Suckling's idea of the sun upon an Easter day was—not to be despised."

"Shall you ask her for this next dance?"

"She has been claimed already," Mark said, his eyes upon Nora's figure as she softly passed before him.

"Oh! what a pity for you," cried Will, ruefully, "because I could have the next myself."

"Do," said Mark, coolly. "I will not interfere."

"Did you ever see a girl look happier than she does?" asked Will, evidently caring little for his companion's replies, so engrossed was he in watching Nora. "I'm sure she likes Heaton very much; and just think of the difference she will make here for me!"

"When?" inquired Mark, reflectively. And then Will turned to look at him for the first time.

"I declare even yet," he said with a smile, "I hardly know when you are jesting, Poynz. When she is my wife, I mean. Didn't you always know what question I intended to ask Nora to-day? She—she escaped it once, but she will listen, I hope, before they leave."

"Take my advice for once, Will," counselled Mark. "Let her have this one day as a real schoolgirl's holiday."

"It shall be a better holiday than that. It shall be the best of her life," asserted young Foster; "for it shall prove to her that all her hard work is over."

"Very well," said Mark; "go and take your chance. But (for your own sake I speak this time, old fellow) whatever man proposes marriage to Miss St. George to-night will go home by Weeping Cross."

"I should be very miserable if I thought so," returned Will, without a shade of anxiety in his voice. "You do not yourself think she will refuse me, do you, Poynz? I am not blessed with an extensive income, certainly, but then Nora has not been brought up in wealth and luxury. She would actually not know what to do with riches, I believe, if she had them."

"Then you are a fortunate fellow not to have them. You had better make haste if you are going to join this dance."

"You see," continued Will, engrossed as usual in what he wished to say, "she will be quite a little queen in this parish; and I know

enough of her to be certain she will help me in doing all the good I can."

"Did you ever read 'Joseph Andrews?'" interpolated Mark, rather chillily.

"I think so ; but why?"

"Don't you remember how sensibly Mrs. Adams reminded Mr. Adams that it was blasphemous to talk Scripture out of church?"

"My dear fellow, what do you mean?" questioned Foster, though he comprehended more than he fancied he did, in that cool interruption to his rhapsody.

"That, if you intend to lose this dance, I do not."

In another minute Mark was at Helen Archer's side. But Helen, with her slow rare blush, gently and gratefully declined to give up her task to enjoy that, or even any future dance. And yet after the next Mr. Poynz came up with the same request ; and it was just then that Nora stooped down and laid her hand upon Helen's.

"I know just one valse quite well," she said. "Let me play that through and through, and give you a rest. Mr. Poynz, do persuade her to dance ; they are all enjoying themselves except Helen."

"Indeed I am enjoying myself," she answered them, gently. "I like to play, and, above all things, I like to see your pleasure."

"Miss St. George," said Mark, speaking almost wearily as he watched her pretty, earnest pleading, "if I were to ask you to dance this valse with me——"

"Nora," put in Will, joining her eagerly, "come!"

She glanced for one moment up into Mark's face, as if she consulted him; but, when he coolly stepped back a little, as if he had no share in either their acts or words, she gave her hand to her old friend, and took her place laughingly in the dance.

"I never saw such real enjoyment," said Miss Archer, speaking low, as she turned her eyes back to her music. "Will she enjoy so keenly every pleasure that the world holds, do you think, Mr. Poynz?"

"I trust so; as freshly, purely, and unsuspectingly."

"Does she not look beautiful to-day? What is the charm about her?"

"The perfect harmony of—— Miss Foster, not dancing!" added Mark, his tone changing entirely at Genevieve's silent approach. "Will

you turn that extraordinary circumstance into felicity for me?"

The last dance came presently, then the time for leaving, and Mark and Nora had not danced together. "But," Mark said to himself, "I have told her what I wished to tell; and this was Will's day after all."

So Mark's horses came round in the moonlight; for, though it was decided that the Fosters should return by train from Guildford, Mr. Poynz would drive them thither, and Will was going on to London with them. It was not a silent drive, for Miss Foster was lavish with praise for the skill with which Mark guided his horses in the rather deceptive light; and Victoria had much to say about the people she had met that day. Yet everyone noticed how still Nora sat, one hand linked in childish fashion within Miss Archer's arm, her eyes very wondering in their gaze upon the lovely moonlit scene, and her thoughts wide and vague and beautiful with indescribable happiness. Helen Archer was very silent too, but that fact struck no one who would remark upon it, and Mrs. Foster was still sufficiently wakeful to strike occasionally the lagging conversational steed with her useful spurs. And, if Mark Poynz sat rather

mutely on his seat, Will Foster, from the seat behind, had much to say in his pleasant excitement.

Just once Mark turned to look, as Will struggled manfully (but unsuccessfully) in his efforts to rouse Nora into a colloquial humour. As he turned, Nora's eyes were lifted from the fair calm scene, and met his ; and, though the thoughtfulness remained, she smiled as she met his glance.

"I ought to say it too, Mr. Poynz," she said, when they were parting at the station, and she had heard the ladies expressing their unbounded pleasure in the drive, and acknowledging their due sense of indebtedness to him, "and I don't know how, though it has been such a very, very happy day—the happiest I have ever had."

"Such words are the richest thanks a man can wish."

Mark said it quietly, as he took her hand and clasped it for a moment. And then Will came up to hurry her into the railway-carriage, and Mark stood back.

A grasp of the hand from Will, with the comforting assurance that the young pastor would return to his flock as soon as Nora had

left London ; a few beaming smiles and a dainty hand-waving from Miss Foster ; the same from Tory, who came to the front under difficulties ; and a gracious nod from Mrs. Foster. Then the train had passed on, and left Mark standing still, his thoughts far in that receding carriage, where Nora sat wrapt in the silence of a happiness which that moonlit drive had deepened and elevated, and which seemed to belong to her as thoroughly as the joyous happiness of the day, because in each there was, as Mark had said, such perfect harmony.

"I think," remarked Miss Foster, moodily, as she settled herself far back into her corner, and let out a little of her suppressed disappointment, "it was stiff and disagreeable of Mr. Poynz not to ask us to his own house."

Will's laugh burst out merrily.

"You must have dined with his horses then, Jenny. He keeps up an establishment for no one else down there."

CHAPTER V.

Sorrow ends not when it seemeth done.

Richard III.

IT was the day after Nora's return to Ireland, and she and Celia Pennington (the younger children following them in a bevy, for Nat and Tom were at Portora now) had been wandering about the house and garden, in the happiest, idlest way.

And yet, from the first hour of her return, Nora had been conscious of a *something* between herself and Celia which had never been between them before; the very thinnest, vaguest cloud it was, yet a cloud which Nora could not dispel, and the source of which she never guessed; for who was to tell her that Nuel Armstrong, through his friendly intercourse at the Vicarage, had daintily sown seeds of suspicion and dis-

trust, which should ripen and serve his own purpose. Such tiny seeds, and so gradually and skilfully sown, that Celia never suspected their presence, and only very slowly grew to feel sorry that Nora was, during her stay in England, changing into a heartless girl, who would scorn the old Irish life and so-called pleasures. And, now that Nora was with her, the idea was too firmly rooted to be thrown aside; while all the time Nora, revelling in a new, delightful holiday, told herself again and again—and tried to believe it—that it was only a wrong and ungrateful fancy of hers that Celia was changed, and that life at the Vicarage was not so all-satisfying and so utterly cloudless as she had used to feel it must be.

In the earliest dawn of that day Nora had been to Traveere, wandering about the rooms with Kitty, and seeing that, though they were made habitable, there had been no attempt to beautify them. Then she and Breen and Kitty had breakfasted together, in a festive manner, and she had run back to the Vicarage in time to wake Celia from her first sleep. The whole forenoon had been spent by the two girls in the village, on parish errands; and, now that the early dinner was over, Nora had put on her hat,

and was going to see Rachael Corr, and have a long afternoon chat with her—"if Rachael will spare the time," she added, simply, to Celia, who had come in now, and sat at the window, wondering how Nora could have spent a year in London, and yet have so few fashionable things to exhibit to her.

"Considering how anxious Mrs. Corr has always been for any atom of news of you, Nora," she observed, "I should think she would like to spare a whole week to chat with you, as you say."

"But I couldn't spare it, could I?" smiled Nora. "I must begin to work in earnest after to-day. Mr. Pennington advises an advertisement, Celia."

"Nora," interposed Celia, thoughtfully, making no pretence to follow a subject which did not occupy her own thoughts, "did Mr. Foster travel with you at all from England?"

"Oh, no! Nuel fetched me, you know, commissioned by Mr. Doyle. Why should Mr. Foster have come?"

"Doctor Armstrong had told me he would. Will he come up to see Mr. Ponz, do you think?"

"Mr. Ponz? Is he—Oh, I remember he

said he should come to Traveere, perhaps! I wonder whether he will."

"We have just heard that he is there, but papa doesn't believe it, so he is going to send a note over. Were the Fosters sorry to part with you, Nora?"

"Very—*very*. I don't think either of them will enjoy life any more. Their sun has set."

"You mean the girls!" laughed Celia, watching the merry, sensitive mouth, and struck by its beauty now as if she had never seen it before. "Wasn't their mother kinder to you?"

"Yes."

"And Will? It was hardest, I suppose, to part from him?"

"No; it was hardest to part from Miss Archer. Don't, Celia—I am not joking. She was *very* kind to me; and one reason why I am going to work so hard, is that I may repay her. Listen! You are called."

At the Vicarage-gate the children—who had clung to Nora's side—were taken back by Celia, and Nora went on across the bog alone; singing softly to herself as in old times, and feeling as if those long twelve months in London must have been a dream, from which

she had awakened back to the old, unbroken life.

"It will feel even more so presently," she said, the last notes of her song melting into an involuntary sigh, "for Nuel said he should be back again to-day; he is so *very* much a part of my old life."

The sound of a swift, light step, which, though almost noiseless on the turf, struck familiarly on Nora's ear, made her stop and turn; and then a warm, kind smile beamed in her beautiful eyes, and she stooped to bring her head on a level with the shaggy head of the bare-footed child who, in one nondescript garment just twice too big for him, was hurrying after her.

"Why, Larry," she said, drawing her head back in a critical, admiring sort of way, as she took both the lad's rough hands into her own, "what a big boy you are growing!"

"Stap, Miss Nora!" he cried, in real fright, as he unclenched the fingers of one hand, and showed a letter, crushed and soiled. "Take it, please; I be's to rin now, an' niver stap!"

Before Nora had time to question him, the child was speeding out of sight across the bog, and so, smiling as she stood, she opened the soiled envelope, and drew a slip of paper from

it. Could Larry's drunken father have learned to *write* during that year she had been away? Or could Larry himself have scribbled her a line to show his progress? These thoughts were only momentary, for she had not stood two minutes there before the paper was hidden in her dress, and she was walking back towards the Vicarage, steadfast in purpose, though so sadly deep in thought. For the few lines were from Rachael Corr, and this was what they said—

“As I guess that you will soon be coming to see me, Miss Nora dear, I shall put Larry to watch until he can give this into your own hand, and then not wait a moment, for fear he should be seen. Miss Nora, for the sake of all that love you, don't come here at all to-day! But I must see you as soon as I can do it safely. I must speak to you where *no one* can see us or hear us. I will be at Larry's cottage by the river at dusk. Will you go there alone—quite alone? If you fail, this night will ruin us all; but, even if you come, what can we do? Oh! how hard it is for me to be the one to make you miserable! But I don't know

what to do, Miss Nora dear. I must tell it all to you—and even then what can we do? Burn this quickly.

“RACHAEL.

“In the dark to-night. Oh! don't forget.”

CHAPTER VI.

Love gave her courage, love exilèd fear,
 Love to her tired limbs new vigour lent,
 Till she approachèd where the Squire abode.

TASSO.

A LOW, ungainly cabin, inclining feebly back towards the stony mud from which (just twenty years ago between one sunset and sunrise) it was formed clumsily by the hands of the squatter. An awkward, dejected building, which looked as if it resented the power those two crooked poles possessed to keep its leaning form a little longer in the similitude of a habitation, and longed for the opportunity to crumble—in utter exhaustion—back into a heap of clods and stones from which nothing would be expected in the shape of shelter and comfort. Between the door and a stagnant pond of impure water, one faded elderly duck, without a feather on her head, was roosting wearily ;

and, beyond the water, a little lad stood wrapped in infinite delight, both his dirty hands full of barley-sugar, and his cheeks and lips shining with its traces. It was dusk even out upon the unsheltered level, yet little Larry Hogan could see for half a mile along the river-path. But the gloom of the miserable cabin within hurried the darkness of night, and the woman who stood alone there waiting, could discern little of the squalid scene around her. She walked restlessly up and down upon the rough mud floor, and the famishing chickens—whose hope had filtered from them through many neglected generations—let her pass by unworried. Then, when she was quite tired, she paused at the window, with her head against the wall, and her hands upon her eyes, waiting for Nora—for the small square aperture which once had been a window was so successfully patched with bits of cloth and paper that Rachael felt as safe from observation there as she had been farther within the darkening cabin. Surely, surely it was dark enough now for Miss Nora to come! Yet suppose she should come too soon and be seen! Ah, no! She was always quick to understand, and she would never fail in any trust or promise.

There was a step at last, a running step, which passed the window and halted at the door, returning as fast as it had come; but Rachael knew that Larry had pushed open the door for some one to enter, and so she dropped her hands, knowing that the light was fading fast, and that she had no time to lose.

Coming, even from the dark without, into the darker room, Nora could for a few minutes distinguish nothing; but Rachael's eyes had been covered, and were accustomed to the gloom now, so she could see Nora's face, and, seeing it, she stood quite still, and made no step to meet the one for whom she had watched so anxiously for a whole hour. For Rachael was conscious, even in this sudden meeting, of a change which the year's absence had made in Nora; and, vague as it was, she tried to grasp and comprehend it before she spoke. But she failed, for the difference was too subtle to be traced through the old, glad, simple greeting which came so naturally from Nora's lips when she saw Mrs. Corr.

"Don't look sorry to see me, Rachael," she pleaded then, just in the old wistful way. "I have been so looking forward to seeing you. I was on my way this afternoon when Larry met

me with your note. It—it frightened me a little, Rachael; but surely nothing has happened which could make you sorry to see me?"

"Miss Nora"—Rachael had eagerly received and returned the girl's kiss and caress; but now she had turned away, and was once more pacing the rugged ground, with her head bent and her hands clasped—"don't speak of that; don't remind me how long you've been away, and that *this* is how I meet and welcome you at last. My dear, my dear, don't talk of that. Talk of—How dark it gets! It seems as if the night were flying to meet us. Miss Nora, open the door again. I—cannot breathe!"

"Rachael," said the girl gently, as she opened the cabin-door a little wider, "tell me what the trouble is. I have been for hours preparing myself, and you will feel better after you have told it—even only to me."

"But how can I tell?"—Quite suddenly Rachael's words were broken off, as well as her hurried walk, and she stood with her head lifted as if listening for a sound without. Then, just as suddenly, she resumed her hasty walk, and spoke quickly, but almost below her breath.

"I *must* tell it. Not because it will do me

good, or because you are the one who ought to hear it, dear—on this first day you are among us again—but because I can tell no one else. I dare not. Even to yourself, Miss Nora, it may prove to have been the cruellest thing to tell. It is too late, too. How dark it grows! Miss Nora, can you understand me?"

"Not yet," said Nora, her tone very quiet and pitiful, but her eyes clear and fearless, as she stood leaning against the smoky chimney, trying hard to follow Rachael's meaning. "Is it about Shan?"

The question was interrupted by a cry from Mrs. Corr, and then the words seemed literally to totter from her lips.

"Yes, about Shan, Miss Nora. I—I cannot break it to you as I meant. It's about Shan. He has sworn an oath that to-night—at dark—he will shoot—Mr. Poynz—at Traveere!"

The woman's face was covered in the gloom; but Nora still stood looking at her, waiting for the meaning of her words to shine out of this awful mist, thought itself suspended in that momentary hush.

"That's what I had to tell, Miss Nora!" cried Rachael, breaking the silence sharply in her torture. "You understand it now—my misery,

I mean—for—oh, I pray God the misery is *only* mine !”

“To-night—in the darkness ?” questioned Nora, pushing the hair from her white face, and looking with a straight, direct gaze through the open doorway as she approached it.

“Miss Nora,” cried Rachael, hastily intercepting her, “where are you going ? Oh, my dear, don’t let what I have told you make you rash, and put your own life in danger ! Tell me where you are going.”

“To Traveere,” said Nora, a terrible bewilderment in her low intense tones, though the two words were so clear and so distinct.

“Not yet,” pleaded Rachael, nervously ; “wait and think. Let us try to think what is wise. You will see the best, for I have tried, and tried in vain—for hours ; but I must help you too, because I know it all. You would go to warn Mr. Poynz. Miss Nora, if *that* would save him, *I* could have done it ; but—but listen !”

The anguish in the woman’s voice grew more and more acute while she spoke, and Nora took her hand pityingly as they stood ; but the girl did not move away from the open door, and she was still looking beyond it, towards where her

old home lay in the darkness, nearly a mile away.

"Think, Miss Nora—try to think, and see it all as clearly as you can, and I—I will try to show you. And then—but *how* can we two prevent it, except to make Shan more desperate than he is, and more bent upon the—the crime—which he must have been plotting for so long?"

"Why?"

"Why?" echoed Rachael, really frightened by the girl's unnatural calmness. "Heaven only knows, Miss Nora, why it is, but he has hated the English gentleman from the first—doubly hated him when he took Micky away; and—and I think something else must have happened, too, that I never heard of—at the time of—your grandfather's death. He wouldn't pay his rent; and, though I've saved it at last, Mr. Doyle wouldn't take it from me. All this year Shan has been getting worse and worse, though I would not have thought, even a year ago, that he *could* be worse than he was. He's belonging now to the wildest and wickedest set in Ireland, and they would none of them be afraid of the worst crime on earth. They know they can frighten even the police; they have got safe

hiding-places, and can help each other. Oh, my dear, don't go! What can you do? What can we do? If we warned Mr. Poynz, it would make *him* angry and daring, and make Shan all the more determined to do effectually to-morrow what he might possibly be prevented doing to-day. I knew that, or I should have gone to Traveere myself hours ago; I knew, too, that then Shan would—would have had”—the woman's voice sank to a miserable whisper now—“my own life to answer for as well as the stranger's—the life of his father's wife. For I know him far too well to think that anything I could do would have any effect but that of maddening him against two instead of one; and, Miss Nora, do you think I would let *you* venture?”

“Shan shall never suspect me,” said Nora, clearly and quietly, “and above all, he can never suspect you. Would it not be safest for you to hurry home? Suppose he missed and traced you?”

“He was out,” whispered Rachael; “not to return to night. It was for that I waited. While he was at home I could not venture beyond the cottage door; and even now I dare not go near Traveere or Kilver; nor could I

let you be seen going anywhere where I might be. Oh, my dear, what a day this has been—worse than—worse than one other day of horror which I can remember many years ago!”

“You will hurry home, Rachael,” entreated Nora, earnestly, as for the first time in her life she felt the awful atmosphere of crime surrounding herself. “You will hurry home for—all our sakes. I am going on to Traveere.”

“Miss Nora,” cried Rachael, sharply, “you—you must not warn Mr. Poynz. He would try to seize Shan, and—and there would be *murder* even more surely than if he was shot through his own window. And, if you tempted Mr. Poynz away, would not Shan suspect and meet him? If you took others to help, it would be worse, as Shan has far more help ready, and all this would only make him more desperate. Ah! shouldn’t I have done *that*—if it had been possible—without telling you? My dear, you cannot stay it. God help us! Shan will be lying among the trees in the avenue to-night, as soon as it is utterly dark, and from there he will shoot into the sitting-room—oh! wait, wait till I tell you—horrible as it is to say, I must tell you all—through the window, for Mr. Poynz

will sit there, and must have a light, and—and you know how unprotected all the windows are, and how easily Shan——”

“Where is Dr. Armstrong, Rachael?”

“In Enniskillen to-day,” whispered Mrs. Corr, her breath failing her now, and every syllable an effort. “He comes to Traveere to-night with Mr. Doyle, and by that time—it will be late in the night—it will be over. Oh, Miss Nora, if we could save him till then! But how can I let you go? It—it was only through such a wonderful chance that I heard his terrible plan, which has been made for months, and only waiting an opportunity. I—— No, no, my dear, I will not keep you to tell you *that*. It is enough that I heard and discovered it. That very hour I sent to warn you; and the day has seemed a year to me—*this* day, which I had looked forward to so long, when I was to see you again.”

“And I,” said Nora, wistfully, “was so happy just when I met Larry, for I was coming to spend hours with you, Rachael, and tell you good things of Micky. Now,” she went on, gently drawing her fingers from Mrs. Corr’s, “give me a kiss, and—pray for—us.”

“Oh, Miss Nora, stop!”

But something in Nora's manner stifled this timid entreaty, and the poor scared, panic-stricken woman, whose alarm was twofold, stood back and owned the wiser decision of the girl whose purpose was so single.

Little Larry Hogan, dirty and ragged, stood just in Nora's way as she ran down to the river-path; but, though she spoke to him, and put something into his sticky hand, she did not pause a second. Rapidly now the darkness was settling like a cloud upon the bog, and Nora was grateful in her heart for its concealment, even in spite of that other remembrance of what else it was to hide. The way was so familiar to her that no light was needed for a guide, and the swift footsteps never paused nor diverged. It was just beside the fallen pine—where a year ago Will Foster and Mark had found her—that she turned from the river, and ran straight across the pathless fields towards Traveere.

“He has sworn an oath that to-night at dark he will shoot Mr. Poynz at Traveere.”

If it would but rain, she thought, as she caught sight of the dim outlines of the old house. If it would but rain, that she might seek shelter there boldly and naturally! But there fell no kindly drops through the heavy

night air; nor could it cool her fevered lips as she sped through it.

She could not see the window of the familiar sitting-room, as she crept noiselessly up to the kitchen door; but—as clearly as it could have been in reality—did she see in imagination that lighted square of bare, unshuttered glass beyond which Mr. Poyuz sat, unconscious of the weapon to be pointed so surely in the darkness outside. Had she not often and often heard how cleverly Shan Corr could shoot, and how constantly he practised, as if he never could be perfect enough? And did she not know exactly how quiet Mr. Poyuz could be for long minutes at a time, while—— The thought died shudderingly, and, with fingers hurried and nervous (though they were so quiet) Nora turned the handle of the kitchen door. For a moment she paused then, for old Kitty sat alone before the low turf-fire, and in that moment it seemed to Nora as if she must be going up to her as in the old times, frankly to tell her plans and her perplexities to this sole confidante of hers. But just as Kitty turned, with the vague consciousness of a presence in the room, Nora remembered, clearly and distinctly, all that she must leave unsaid.

"Saints be good to us!" cried Kitty, knocking over her stool as she rose to her feet. "Is it yerself, Miss Nora, an' be-yerself alone, an' no purrson wid ye this hour o' the night! 'The tinder hearrt o' ye come to see th' owld place agin! An' it's meself wurr thinkin' o' ye thin, an' ye've shockened me now at all, fur I be's oulder thin I used to be, me dear, an' it gives me a burrstin' o' me hearrt to see ye so suddin-like, an' 'thout suspectin' ye. Come up to the fire, doaty, furr it's just starrvin' ye look. Mother o' mortals, it wurrn't that weh ye wurr lookin' whin ye parrted frum Ireland, as whitesome an' as sicksome as a sowl in purgory, wid niver a wurrd to spake too, whin ould Kitty hearken-ed vainfully for a twalvemonth gone iver an' alwis fur the voice of ye! Didn't I know it wurr disimproovin' ye to kape ye over the wide say intirely? Stap a minute, doaty. Whurr be's ye goin', so cowld an' stiff as y' are?"

"To Mr. Poynz," said Nora, as she crossed the kitchen. "Is he in the sitting-room, Kitty, and no one with him?"

"No purrson, barr'n Bran, me dear," returned the old woman, pondering Nora's words and manner: "on'y Bran, th' ould laze, lyin' iver an' alwis afore the fire, jist whither thurr be's

one or no. Miss Nora, doaty, what is it y're wantin' wid the gintleman?"

"A message, Kitty. What is he doing?"

"Writin', me dear. It's all this blissed day sin' tay-time he's bin at it. Dade but it's yerself that's quare intirely, wantin' to go in to him, an' I jist afther lightin' candles an' shuttin' up fur the night, on'y there ben't nothin' to shut; an' why he come it's harrd to know, an' I thought it quare. But now, saints forgive ye! it's yerself that's quarer, Miss Nora dear. That I should live to see this blissed day an' yer sowl so throubled. Glory to——"

While she spoke, Kitty had been following Nora from the kitchen and across the hall; but what was the use of finishing her sentence? Miss Nora evidently heard nothing of it, and only looked round just for one moment to give her a smile before opening the door, and then went on into the silent room. No, it was of no use worrying and talking over it to her; so Kitty went back to her kitchen, and muttered to herself, while she was busy in making a cup of tea for Miss Nora—and for herself, of course, at the same time—feeling it a panacea for every hurt and sorrow.

"Bliss her, she shan't go out agin into the

cowldness 'thout somethin' to s'port her. Isn't it meself knows how plased she'll be to see it rid-dy whin she comes back agin through here, fur manny's the toime she's thried to wheedle a wee faste out o' me, whin I've had the harrd worrk to git the bit an' sup fur the ginerall males."

But while the tea grew stronger and stronger upon the stone hearth, the old woman, in her solitude, slept with her head on the settle.

CHAPTER VII.

The quick flames rise, the quick flames fall,
But the core of the fire, like a heart, beats bright.
My fancies rise, and my fancies fall,
But my heart beats time to the fire-core white.

The Wife's Sorrow.

A PLEASANT turf-fire glowed and flamed in the dingy sitting-room at Traveere, and near it (almost exactly between it and the open window) Mr. Poynz sat writing at the unsteady old table, on which two lighted candles stood. Never had there been such a blaze of light in the gloomy room, either through Colonel St. George's occupation of Traveere, or since his death—never until this night, when the light was to guide the murderer.

Mark had turned aside from the table, and had his pen idle in his hand, when the door was quietly opened, and Nora came in—came in just as if it were a natural thing for her to

visit him alone, after darkness had fallen on the world without. But, though her ease was so pretty, he could see that she only maintained it by a great effort, and that her face was white and her eyes troubled, as he had seen them only once before. With a great gladness in his eyes, he had risen in the first moment; but the gladness rapidly gave way to apprehension.

"I'm—please don't ask me what is the matter, Mr. Poynz," Nora said, hurrying over the words when she saw what question was on his lips. "Everyone is well at the Vicarage—I am quite well—nothing has happened. Please understand all that, and don't question me to-night. I—am come to pay you a call. I have called upon you—isn't that the right expression in society? Please say you are glad to see me."

"I am *very* glad to see you," Mark said, doing his best to hide his surprise, and pretending not to see the shy, pained colour that had rushed into her face. "I was only beginning to wish that I had made Traveere more comfortable. This is the first evening I have spent here. But I am expecting Doyle to-night; and he must have been detained, for I sent to summon him long ago. I wish to see him here, else

I should probably have been at the Vicarage or Fintona to-night. I am at your service, Miss St. George. I will go home with you whenever you wish."

"Thank you," she returned, simply. "I will tell you when I am ready. They don't know I am here, unless they guess. I cannot tell you why I came—until to-morrow; but you trust me, don't you?"

"Trust you!" he echoed, his warm eyes full of amusement as well as of utter confidence in her. "I should—no, I will be like yourself, and tell you *to-morrow*. Wait, Miss St. George, and let me close it."

This he added because she glanced towards the open window and shivered a little.

"No—no, please," she said, as she intercepted him. "I like to do it. I could fancy," she went on, without lowering her voice, as she stood alone in the narrow aperture, "that I was living here still with grandpa. It is just as quiet as it used to be. No one ever used to come to Traveere—after dark."

"Not even Dr. Armstrong?" questioned Mark, lightly, though he was wondering why she made it impossible for him to stand beside her at the window, and look out with her into the

darkness. "Come to the fire, Miss St. George; you have grown chilly."

"Yes," she said, turning readily. "If you will lead the way, I will follow."

He laughed quite heartily then, as he crossed the room to the hearth; but, when she *literally* followed him, and stood beside him there—still between him and the unshuttered window—a vague, uneasy feeling grew upon him that something must be amiss with her. Could she be suffering from any nervous girlish attack, the result of her return to the old scenes of her lonely youth? Could her paleness and excitement be the precursors of a serious illness? He checked the thought in real self-pity, but he could not so quickly change the watchfulness and anxiety of his gaze; and Nora raised her eyes just then, and read it.

"Mr. Poynz," she said, without any hesitation, though she did not know herself what words she was going to utter, "will you please allow me, for just this one evening, to fancy myself at home here again, doing as I like, and going where I like? And will you do as I ask you—just this once?"

"You are sure you will claim the privilege only *just this once*?" he asked, trying to decide

that some unexpected trouble or pain had upset her, but failing to do so when he met the frank, entreating glance. "Then I think I may safely promise. Will you stir the fire, Miss St. George? You understand a turf-fire so much better than I do."

"Thank you," she said, not for that proposal, but because she saw now that he would understand, and not question or doubt her. "It is very dark, isn't it? Did you notice how *suddenly* it grew dark to-night?"

"No; but then I have been sitting here all the evening, so the twilight seemed long to me. I remember looking out and thinking with Moore that 'evening lingered in heaven.'"

"Oh, no!" said Nora, in simple surprise. "The night came all at once, like the sudden unfolding of two great black wings between us and heaven. I have never seen it so before."

"He is not well to-day, poor fellow," observed Mark, presently, looking down upon the old sheep-dog, and marvelling to see that, though Nora was looking at him too—wistfully, and even tenderly—she would not stoop from her upright position to bestow a touch or a caress.

"I must give you a glass of wine," said Mark, suddenly moving to the table; but his

hand was unsteady as he poured it, for Nora had walked with him there, and stood again at his side.

She took the wine and drank a little of it obediently; but when he said he would put a chair for her beside the fire, she stopped him—though speaking still just in her own pretty, gentle tone—for he must not think her ill or requiring care; he must not try to bestow on *her* the protection she longed to give.

“Yes, I will sit down, Mr. Poynz. Of course I must take a seat, as I am paying you a call. Please be very entertaining. You were writing, weren't you, when I came in? Then would you mind lending me a book—this one upon the table, please—to read while you go on with your writing?”

“Is that what you wish?” asked Mark, cleverly once again hiding his surprise. “Then where will you sit?”

As he carried the chair, she walked with him up to the seat he had been occupying all the evening, and, with her back to the window, directed him, laughingly, how to place hers; and, when he had done her bidding, smiling a little himself too, she sat down on her high, uncomfortable chair, in the direct line from the

window; while he sat writing busily beyond her, preoccupied by his work, as it seemed to her. And beyond the unshuttered window—against which the darkness lay like a sable curtain, and towards which Nora tried never once to glance—Shan Corr crouched, with his loaded rifle against his shoulder, waiting just for that clear aim which should make a second's work effectual.

Once Mark put down his pen and rose to replenish the fire, but the moment he did so Nora uttered a little exclamation of delight, and came up eagerly to show him a passage in her book. As she read it to him, standing close beside him, he watched her with a scrutiny which was almost painful; but no suspicion could live in her presence, and no mystery in her coming could, after all, make her companionship anything but a joy to him.

"I suppose, Miss St. George," he said, in his cool, easy tones, as he took his seat once more, and she took hers with an unconscious sigh of relief, "that the year you spent in England seems almost like a dream to you, now you are at home again? How little I saw you during that long year! Are you and I to—" He corrected himself bravely—too thorough a gen-

tleman to take advantage of the quiet hours she had voluntarily given him, and knowing her too well to believe that this was a motiveless and idle visit. Had she not told him, too, that she would explain it on the morrow?

"And now I shall begin to teach at once, when I've found some children to teach," she said, simply. "Celia says it will be a very dull and wearying life—unless I chance to travel."

"Travel as a governess? What infinite delight the plan unfolds! My child, be content with the pleasant journeys you take in your loneliest moments, until—— And you have quite decided to be a governess, have you?" he added, with an entire change of tone. "That's right, for I know a man who would love to have his children taught by you."

"Not—really?" questioned Nora. "Oh, I wish he would engage me at once!"

"He is ready. Do you know I have had the hardest work in the world, for a whole year, to prevent his trying to engage you before you might think yourself ready? I often feared that he would do it in spite of me."

"I'm not very ready even now," said Nora, sadly, her eyes turning swiftly to the window because Mark at that moment bent forward in

his seat. "I don't know many things, but I should try to be kind, and help this gentleman's children; though I never could be so kind as Miss Archer was to me."

"Never. You are far too full of faults, or—as Pope cautiously puts it—of female errors. But never mind; he himself reminds us we have a remedy."

"How?"

"He says—

'If to her share some female errors fall,
Look on her face and you'll forget 'em all.'

"I should like that," said Nora, reflectively. "It's so disappointing to be constantly reminded of one's errors. As if one *could* oneself ever possibly forget them!"

"Perhaps you might. Some people do."

"Has Miss Foster female errors, do you think?"

"Just possible. But then, you see, I 'looked on her face,' and so, of course, I 'forgot 'em all.'"

"If you had properly forgotten them, you would at once have said 'No, she hasn't any,'" laughed Nora.

"I see. I am growing very much accus-

tomed now to a plump descent into Charybdis. My—— My child, what is it?"

"Did I frighten you?" asked Nora, her lips smiling, though they were ashy-white, and her wide eyes fixed upon the window, where the firelight darted to and fro upon the bare black panes. "I am very sorry. No, no, please don't go. I daresay Bran stirred upon the hearth and startled me. Please sit here still, Mr. Poynz; I—I want you to read me these few pages. Please do—just in your old attitude."

So, wondering a good deal, he remained as she wished, and read on and on at her request; while she still sat, in apparent ease and interest, between him and the murderer, whose patience now was ebbing fast.

CHAPTER VIII.

O night, when good men rest and infants sleep!

JOANNA BAILLIE

A SUPPER of cold lamb and salad does not easily spoil by being kept, else would not Mrs. Pennington's occasional glances at the dining-table have been so serene, while she sat sewing beside her own little work-table. Nor would there have been such placidity in the queries she addressed to her daughter, when at last Celia entered the dining-room, complaining, with a sigh, that the practice with the choir had never seemed so long to her before.

"That," remarked the Vicar's wife, "is because you were in haste to be free again, my dear. Of course you naturally enjoy being with Nora, but you must not let the enjoyment interfere with your duties."

"But, mother," queried Celia, having evidently little heeded her mother's advice, "where is Nora? You ought to have sent her to help us when she came in."

"Sent her to you! Why, surely she has been with you all the time?"

"No. Don't you remember she told us she had decided to delay her visit to Rachael Corr till night?"

"How silly!" murmured Mrs. Pennington, handing her needle for Celia to thread.

"Yes, but she would go. Mother, don't you think some one had better fetch her?"

"Very unnecessary, dear," returned Mrs. Pennington, carefully fastening in her thread. "Rachael will see her safely here; but Nora certainly should not have stayed so long."

"It is a whole year since they saw each other," explained Celia, in her practical motherly way. "And Nora will have much to tell Rachael. I will just see whether papa feels inclined for a walk to Mrs. Corr's."

It was so impossible for Celia to hide any of her feelings that the mother plainly saw her anxiety, and she smiled a little.

"You forget how at home Nora is here at Kilver as well as on the bog, Celia. And yet I

am quite sure Rachael would never leave her to walk back alone in the dark. Just take this seam and finish it for me."

Stifling her impatience, Celia sat down beside the lamp, and worked quickly, that she might the sooner be released. If Nat and Tom had been at home they would have run off for Nora long ago. The seam was a long one, and Celia's needle, rapid as it was, took a considerable time in travelling from end to end; so that when, at last, she cut off her thread, she had let her uneasiness grow to unnatural proportions, and her sudden and impetuous opening of the study door startled the good Vicar into the consciousness that he had been an hour asleep over his sermon, and had let the supper-hour pass undisturbed.

"Nonsense," he said, when he had listened to Celia's suggestion of a night stroll to Rachael's cottage. "Where is my little daughter's common sense? Nora was Mrs. Corr's nursling once upon a time—her pet always—and Rachael would be extremely hurt if she fancied we would not trust her to see Nora home. They must be having a long confab together, must they not? Surely supper is ready, and your mother out of patience. Well, dear, another

day is gone, you see, and I'm thankful to feel its work is done."

But the Vicar was only listening to the flattering tale of Hope when he fancied his day's work was over. Before he had even finished his favourite meal—a meal he hated to forego for the benefit of a rare dinner-guest—a summons came to him from an old woman who lived quite a mile from the village, and who sent him the startling intelligence that she was "dyin' intirely."

"She is very often *dyin' intirely*," muttered Mr. Pennington, impatiently, as he put on the overcoat Celia held for him; "and, if a doctor were obtainable, I would think twice before going. But, if I don't go and dose her, and remind her how often she has recovered from an attack of *dyin' intirely*, she will invite all those people about her to her own wake—the force of despondency could no further go, could it, Celia? What a dejected expression, my dear! What is it? Oh, I recollect! Nora's long gossip with the Corrs. Of course she will be here directly."

"You will call round for her, papa, won't you?"

"Certainly, if you wish it; though Rachael

will laugh at me, and say she saw Miss Nora safely home long ago."

Mrs. Pennington, for about an hour after her husband's departure, made a feeble struggle against her overwhelming sleepiness, but gave in bravely at last, and sought her pillow; murmuring a few words, half reproachfully, and half in astonishment, about Nora's curious conduct. For hours the little household—all save Miss Pennington and the stable-boy—had been fast asleep, when the Vicar's familiar knock made Celia start up, with every pulse throbbing.

"Oh! papa," she cried, almost before she had opened the door, "I have been so terrified! I have never spent such a night before. Isn't it dark? Come in—come in quickly. Nora, you have so frightened me! Did you wait on purpose to frighten me?"

"*Nora!*" ejaculated the Vicar, in astonishment, as he came into the little hall. "Why are you speaking to Nora? Surely she is in bed and asleep?"

"Oh, papa, she has never come!"

Mr. Pennington looked down for a few moments into his daughter's face, simply puzzled; and then either the fear he saw there, or his

own sudden change of thought, made his face and voice and manner different.

"I have seen Rachael Corr," he said. "She was nursing and helping old Biddy; though, by the way, she looks terribly ill herself, and far more in need of nursing. She told me Nora left her before it was thoroughly dark. I felt quite satisfied then that she would be here with you, though she might, in her old careless way, have wandered before returning. But now—I don't know what to think."

"Perhaps," suggested Celia, grasping at anything that was not danger for Nora, "she is at Traveere."

"Most unlikely, for Mr. Poynz is there, you know. But—well, if you think that most likely, I will go and see. I cannot myself think of anything wiser to do. What is it, dear? Coming with me? Nonsense! You will be frightened by the darkness! Well, well, child, don't cry; come along, if you insist on it. I only warn you it is the blackest night I ever was out in; and, if you are alarmed——"

"I shall be a hundred times more alarmed here!" sobbed Celia, wrapping a shawl about her. "I cannot bear another waiting like this. Will you take a lantern, father?"

"No," said the Vicar, opening the hall-door again, and peering out into the dense darkness; "we can keep to the road by instinct. And we shall be far quicker—and safer too—without the lantern. Now are you ready, dear?"

The boy was called from the kitchen, and entrusted with a message for his mistress, if she called to question anyone. Then Celia clung tightly to her father's arm, and the two went cautiously out through the garden-gate.

Two long Irish miles lay between the Vicarage and Traveere; and, though the two houses had seemed quite near together when Celia had been strolling between them with Nora before their parting, in old days, the road seemed on this night to stretch wearily into a distant county, and twenty times at least the girl turned in the darkness to question her father, in real and piteous alarm,

"Have we lost our way, father? Aren't we on the high road, going on to Fintona? Oh, please don't let us waste time!"

"Here we are," said the Vicar at last, his own relief evident in his tones; "this is the Traveere avenue. Isn't the darkness almost solid? Keep up, dear; we shall find the door presently, and then—— But I see no prospect of Nora being

here. What on earth should bring her here? And, above all, what should *keep* her here, even if she had come? I'm afraid Mr. Poynz will feel very angry at our disturbing him in the middle of the night; luckily it is the only night he ever has spent at Traveere. Wretched old place!" added the Vicar, wrathfully, as he stumbled on towards the house; "Mr. Poynz had far better have accepted our invitation and stayed with us. Take care; walk as steadily as you can, dear, for pity's sake!"

"How silent it is here!" whispered Celia, a little awfully. "I couldn't fancy it holding Nora to-night. Oh, papa, suppose we don't find her even here! Look, look!" she cried, with a sudden change of tone. "There's a light! That is the sitting-room, isn't it? What a beautiful bright light! Oh, how thankful I am! Let us go up and look in. How nice it will be to see Nora there safe!"

"Celia," whispered the Vicar, holding his daughter back—and she could not tell whether his voice was stirred by anger or fear—"you will not glance *uninvited* into any man's private room? What made you start? Ah!"

They had stopped suddenly; and it was well

the darkness hid her father's face from poor little trembling Celia.

"It was—— There are wheels," said Mr. Pennington at last, his head raised in the darkness, as he listened intently. "And yet I thought it was a step among the trees close to us."

"Papa," whispered Celia, clinging to him, "I saw—where the light from the window falls—something move. Oh, make haste, make haste!"

The wheels too, coming now so swiftly behind them, forced them to hurry; so it was just as they reached the ridge of light which shone from the one uncurtained window, that the two gentlemen in the gig behind them saw the darkly-outlined figures, and shouted to them.

Before the call had died into silence, the lighted window was thrown open, and Nora herself stood looking out; upright in the narrow opening, with one hand on either frame of the window, as if she kept some one back while she stood facing those who must have alarmed her.

"Nora—oh, Nora," cried Celia, springing forward, "we have been so frightened! But you are safe, and I don't care now. What are you looking for beyond? It's Doctor Arm-

strong; I know his voice. Did you know I was here, that you came so quickly and stood to be the first to meet us, while Mr. Poynz could not—— Oh, Nora!"

Celia had paused, and then uttered a hasty exclamation; for, without a word in answer, Nora had slipped to the ground, and now her face was hidden as she knelt, and she was motionless as the dead.

For many years the Vicar of Kilver had entertained a shrewd but secret suspicion that Dr. Armstrong's silence and suavity might conceal a little of the pitiless ferocity that sometimes underlies a passionate and selfish nature; but never had he deemed it possible that he should see such fierce, half-smothered passion exhibited as in that minute when they all entered the lighted sitting-room at Traveere, without having waited for a word of invitation to do so.

At the first sound of Nuel Armstrong's excited voice, Nora lifted her head and rose, a tremor, either of fear or of fully returning consciousness passing through her as she did so.

"Nuel," she said, with a great weariness in the tones that had been all night so clear and natural, "I want to tell you——"

The words broke into a cry of real fear when

she saw his face, and with her hands upon her temples, she leaned back against the window-frame, trembling violently, now that the long tension was over.

"Oh, Nora," cried Celia, running to her, "what is the matter, dear? I have never seen you this way before to-night."

"Because before to-night," said Dr. Armstrong, literally hissing the words at Mark, over the head of the meek little Vicar, as Mr. Poyntz poured out a glass of wine for Nora, but put it down immediately on seeing Kitty enter with a cup of tea, "she has never been put into such a position. Doyle, this Englishman's conduct shall be explained in a court of justice."

"I am glad to hear it," observed Mark, just glancing at the physician for a moment with easy contempt, as he gave the tea for Nora into Celia's ready hands; "because in his own house the Englishman's conduct will not be explained at all."

"I can explain in a moment," said Nora, pushing the thick soft hair from her face. "I was by the river—quite by the river, Mr. Pennington; and it had grown dark—so dark, Celia; and I—was frightened. I never was frightened in my life as I was frightened then."

I—it came so natural to me to run here. It was like going home, almost. And I felt safe here. Nuel, I begged to stay; I couldn't—indeed, indeed I couldn't go out again as long as the darkness lasted. I begged Mr. Poynz to keep me. I—— Nuel, how *dare* you look as if I told a falsehood to you?"

The brief outbreak of passion was almost terrible in its sudden intensity as the girl's wide dark eyes flashed their scornful gaze into Dr. Armstrong's.

"I shall explain"—her voice was low and tired again now, but her effort to be calm and natural was not without success—"only to Mr. Pennington and Mr. Poynz, unless Mr. Doyle will listen too. I have nothing more to say to *you*, Nuel, about my cowardice in running here for company and safety."

"Now thin, Miss Nora, be dhrinkin' yer tay, me dear. It's three pairrts asleep ye be's, an' iver likely too, in the middle o' the night. An' it's riddy fur bed we all be's, an' the rest of us wantin' to stairrt in gigs. Now thin, doaty, dhrink away, an' nothin' pay."

More than one of the listeners smiled at Kitty's unusual, heavy coaxing, but Nora herself seemed to understand why, at that moment,

Kitty should address her as she had so often done in her lonely babyhood.

"This is very nice," she said, smiling into the old woman's dim eyes, when she had raised the tea-cup to her lips. "But it is a curious time to have tea, isn't it? And," with a sweeping glance, the carelessness and tranquillity of which were well feigned, "no one else is having it with me? Please, Kitty, bring some for Celia."

"Never mind, dear," whispered Celia, quite at ease now that Nora was found, and comprehending little of the uneasiness of others; "we are going when you have drunk that. We are only waiting for you."

"Thank you," said Nora, simply; but it seemed as if Celia's words had had quite a different effect from that of hastening her.

"I'm glad we brought a gig," observed Mr. Doyle; "for you don't look very fit to walk to Kilver, Miss Nora. No, don't argue, my dear. Just rest and get your roses back. How fortunate it was that Mr. Poynz happened to be staying here for to-night!"

"Dear me, you must have had a very great panic, Nora," put in the Vicar, finding his voice at last, with his eyes fixed on Nora's face, as it

flushed and paled at every uttered word. "I really fail to understand what can have alarmed you so excessively."

"Surely we need not discuss that now," put in Dr. Armstrong, sharply. "Mr. Pennington, shall you drive my cousin back to Kilver, or shall I?"

It seemed as if only that very request had been wanting to rouse Nora into her old self, though her face was still so white and her hands so unsteady. She moved away from the window now, and spoke in her usual tones—a little lower than usual, perhaps, but neither hurried nor tremulous.

"It will be dawn in a few minutes," she said, looking delightedly at Celia, because, without any appearance of haste, she was drinking the tea Kitty had brought her; "and then we may walk, mayn't we, Mr. Pennington? Please don't hurry, Celia. I have many a time been on the bog in the sunrise—at least, we don't see the sun for a long time, but I mean in the dawn. May we walk, Mr. Pennington?"

"I do not know how you are to go back otherwise, my dear," replied Mr. Doyle, placidly sipping his port as he intercepted the Vicar's answer. "The horse that brought us is scarcely

fit for the further journey which he is to make with Dr. Armstrong. I suppose, Armstrong, you are in haste to be off, eh?"

"I have one or two little matters to settle with Mr. Poynz," observed Dr. Armstrong, as he buttoned his coat, while his eyes moved from Nora to Mark, with a savage light in them; "but I shall not settle them here or now. I will drive Nora to Kilver myself. I've no wish to linger in the house of—in such a house as this."

"Breen holds your horse at the side-door," observed Mark, without turning, as he stood near the dying fire. "Nothing need detain you here. The gig will not hold both the young ladies, and, however they go, they will go together."

"I presume, Doyle," Nuel continued, the veins high in his forehead, while he looked beyond Mark as if he had not heard him, "that you will see your ward safely into some place which is an authorised shelter for her. I will talk with her myself to-morrow. Nora, you will remain at home until you have seen me."

"Guests at the Vicarage," put in the Vicar, with one of his rare glimpses of mild disdain,

"are free to go in and out as they please, Dr. Armstrong. Did you forget that Miss St. George is my guest at present?"

"She may be your guest at present," muttered Nuel—"and to-night's scene testifies how safe *that* is for her; but she is in my care always, and I will do as I think wise."

For some few minutes after Dr. Armstrong had left the room, silence rested on the little group. Mr. Pennington slowly paced the room, fretting over having witnessed the unbridled temper of a man who had been an acquaintance for so many years, and would most probably be so for many more. The lawyer stood stroking his chin meditatively, and pondering upon what business Mr. Poynz wanted him at Travere; and Mark himself, while the two girls put down their cups in silence, wondered—as for hours he had never ceased to wonder—what had been Nora's motive in coming to the house.

The dawn was creeping chill and grey along the bog, when at last Mark opened the hall-door for them, and Mr. Pennington paused to persuade him and the lawyer to come with them.

"Let us," said Mr. Doyle, in his cheery way.

"Traveere is but a gloomy dwelling at best, and it will not be *at best* when we have just parted from our friends, will it?"

Mark acceded without any hesitation, guessing nothing of Nora's whispered entreaty to Mr. Pennington to bring them. So they started all together, Nora walking, rather slowly and silently, between Mr. Doyle and the Vicar, and looking about her anxiously all the while; and Celia and Mr. Poynz in advance, talking cheerfully as they went. But, when they had entered the Vicarage, and despatched the sleepy boy to bed, Nora stood before Mark Poynz, and begged him wistfully to listen while she told him what had frightened her.

"Not now," he pleaded earnestly, as he looked down into her white face. "Rest first."

"No, please," she said, looking round upon them all, as they stood in the faint, chill light. "Please let me tell you now—all of you—for I feel——" She had been going to say that she felt that even daylight could not save one whom Shan Corr had determined to murder, and that his defeated plan would make him only more determined and dangerous; but she corrected herself, and, speaking quietly, simply told the plot that had been laid to shoot Mr. Poynz.

And, while he stood and listened, and knew how she had saved him, Mark's face grew white as death.

CHAPTER IX.

The whirligig of Time brings in his revenges.

Twelfth Night.

THOUGH Rachael Corr had never been in bed that night, it was not until the usual hour next day that she opened the front door of her cottage, and began her morning work. She had spent the rest of the night—after she had left old Biddy's cabin—locked into her own little bedroom, and so Shan had not guessed that she was not only awake, but listening in an anguish of fear, when he came in at dawn. And now, when he came down, he would see everything just as usual, and his mother pursuing her ordinary tasks. So Rachael thought, while she pursued these tasks as she

had never done before, her eyes hollow and feverish, her step weak and uncertain, and her hands almost useless in their unsteadiness. At the slightest sound she started backward, as if she had been struck, every limb trembling, and her breath quick and irregular. And just once she folded her hands high above her head, and her lips moved slowly, though the cry never passed them :

“Not murder ! Oh, kind Heaven, not murder !”

Her morning tasks were all finished, and no traces left of her own untasted breakfast, when Shan at last came down-stairs, and, without addressing a word of salutation to his mother, sat down moodily in his place at the table.

“Haven’t ye made a frish cake ?” he demanded, after a time, without turning to his mother, as she sat behind him with her sewing.

“No, not this morning.”

For an instant something in her voice puzzled him, and he turned and gave her one lowering suspicious glance ; but her face was bent over her work, and there was such utter calm in her attitude and occupation that he felt angry with himself for the momentary uneasiness, and

noisily dragging his chair closer to the table, emptied his cup at a draught.

"Ye're moighty quioiet," he remarked presently, his mouth almost too full for the words to be distinguishable, while the tone was harsh and full of distrust.

Mrs. Corr raised her head nervously ; but her eyes went no farther than the little window of the shop. She would have given much to be able to talk—even if only for a few minutes—in her usual way, before Shan left her again ; but it seemed impossible, while her heart was so heavy with dread, and—yes ; even though he was her husband's son—with hatred too.

Suddenly, as she still looked vacantly and wistfully out upon the road, her pulses quickened, and she rose in nervous haste.

"Here's Mr. Doyle," she said, struggling to regain her usual tones, as she opened the outer door ; while Shan muttered angrily that "the liyer" wasn't wanted there.

"I won't come in, thank you, Mrs. Corr," said Mr. Doyle, in a prompt, untroubled way, which in itself gave Rachael infinite relief ; "still I cannot pass the door without asking how you are. All alone, I see," he went on, not allowing her time to contradict him, and to tell

him—what he had cleverly managed to see for himself—that Shan was within hearing distance, “and busy as usual. I mustn’t let Miss St. George come and hinder you, must I? By-the-way, she had such a curious panic last night; but you will hear of it, no doubt, and I need not stop to tell. Only it was odd, wasn’t it, that she should so thoroughly forget present circumstances, in a moment of alarm, that she ran straight to Traveere in the most natural manner? I shouldn’t at all wonder, not at all,” reiterated the lawyer, with no evidence of seeing either Rachael’s eager questioning face or Shan’s heavy indifference, “if she did not cry, ‘Oh, grandpa!’ as soon as ever she reached the familiar rooms. Curious, wasn’t it? And there she waited until Mr. Pennington fetched her after he had left Bidly; so you may guess how late it was. I suppose nothing could have induced her to venture out again before daylight. She never used to be cowardly, I am sure, and yet she seemed unaccountably so last night, when I and Doctor Armstrong arrived and found her there. She says she heard a sound by the river—quite half a mile from Traveere—but of course, as we tell her, it was only in her

imagination. I am sure Mr. Poynz must have been frightened too by her sudden entrance. By-the-way, I don't know why he should have been there either; it is such a comfortless place. Yet he will have another night of it. They wanted him to stay at the Vicarage; but, no, he says he has decided to finish the work in which he was interrupted last night, and he will do it at Traveere, just going on where he began it yesterday evening. He says the room is perfectly comfortable, and that he never missed the carpets or curtains."

Shan sat with his back to the speaker, and no one saw his face, yet Mr. Doyle was well aware that his hands were quite still now, and that his breakfast was suspended.

"And so," continued the lawyer, as he turned to go on his way, "though the Penningtons have done their best to keep him at the Vicarage, and I've done my best to lure him to Fintona, he refuses to spend to-night anywhere but at Traveere. Bah! In solitude in that grim place! Well, every man to his taste, I suppose; and, as he truly says, what is there here for an Englishman to fear?"

There was a little pause, while the lawyer's eyes passed cursorily over the young Irishman's

slouching figure ; and then he spoke, as if in sudden recollection.

"I am actually going away without having given you Miss St. George's message ! I was to tell you she would come and see you to-morrow ; and you are not to take any notice, she says, of her childish fright last night, for she is quite well to-day, and sent you her love. Good day," he added, cheerfully, turning away, while the slow colour rose in Rachael's face, and her eyes grew full of gratitude ; "good day ; I will tell Miss Nora all you say."

Perhaps it was because he remembered that there had not passed a word on Mrs. Corr's side, that a smile broke over his face when he had walked only a few yards away ; but every trace of it had vanished by the time he took his seat in a hired car which was waiting for him on the outskirts of the village.

For quite an hour after he had finished his breakfast, Shan Corr sat over the kitchen fire, doing nothing ; and Rachael, while she worked near the window, scarcely dared to look round at him ; but at the end of that time he got up as if with a sudden resolution, and went upstairs to the little back attic which Micky had been accustomed to share with him. While he

was away, Rachael's hands lay idle in her lap, and her head was raised as if, now that she could not see him, she must needs follow every step. But when, after a long minute's silence, a heavy weight was set down in one corner of the room, and she knew that he had been examining his rifle, she took up her work hastily, and never raised her head again.

When Shan came downstairs at last, he took his hat and passed out of the house without a word; but Rachael, venturing to look after him, saw with relief that he carried nothing in his hand.

He had just reached the open gate of Travere, slouching lazily along with a short clay pipe in his mouth, when Mr. Poynz came down from the house, sauntering too, and with a cigar between his lips.

"I wurr comin' up to the house," observed Shan, in his hard and moody tones. "I wurr bringin' the rint fur our place."

"Too soon," said Mark, a little amusement in his shrewd eyes, as they were fixed on the young Irishman's heavy features. "This is only the first day of May; quarter-day is on the twenty-fourth of next month. In March

and December last, of course, you paid your rent to Mr. Doyle."

"No, I didn't," muttered Shan, evidently trying to repress his surliness. "It's the Chrast-mis an' Laddy-day rint I be's here to pay. An' if ye'll give me a resate I'll not kape ye."

"And why," asked Mr. Poynz, with easy nonchalance, "have you been allowed to remain in that cottage rent-free? Is the country indebted to you for any act of bravery, which Mr. Doyle and I are expected to repay with willingness and pride?"

"Toimes wurr throughother thin," said Corr, counting the silver he had turned out of a greasy little black bag. "If it be's hon'stly I pay it now, what need o' bullyin'? Ye'd better take the tin, an' hand me over a resate as D'yle 'll read plain."

"Yes, I understand," returned Mark, in a pleasant, appreciative sort of way; "you would like that Mr. Doyle—and perhaps anyone else whom it may in the future concern—should see that you were the soul of honesty, to-day, and not at all indebted to me for the roof that covers you. You shall have that receipt, as formally and clearly drawn up as you can wish, to-morrow, Corr."

"To-morra won't do," declared Shan, angrily shuffling under the keen gaze. "I'll be away to-morra."

"You'll be away to-morrow," repeated Mark, pondering. "A little holiday trip, eh? Well, put up your money, and leave it with your mother, while you take that excursion you have planned, and which I hope will do you good. Tell her to keep it in her charge till Mr. Doyle calls upon her for it. If he calls to-morrow morning, *after* you have left, the receipt shall be as correct and circumstantial as if you had paid to-day, and—wiped off all the scores your landlord had against you."

"I'd loike," said Shan, turning back after he had started from the gate, and doing his best to bring in carelessly the question which he knew to be of such vital importance, "to see D'yile; but he—he's back to Fintona, I s'pose, an' not comin' here agin the day?"

"No, not again to-day," acquiesced Mark, placidly. "You can see him to-morrow morning, though, quite early—as early as you will like."

It was quite dark that night when Shan returned home, but he entered the cabin looking a little more genial than usual.

"I met a lad comin' fur ye, mother," he said, lying skilfully. "Ye're wanted to Biddy's. I tould him I'd send ye, an' he needn't come on. Niver mind me tay. I'll git a bit an' sup me-self. You be quick."

"I was just going," announced Rachael, as she nervously tied on her bonnet. "I only waited for you to come in first. Miss Nora has sent for me too. So, if you are going to stay in, I can call round at the Vicarage."

"Call whurr ye loike," returned Shan. "It's loikely I be's goin' out agin, isn't it, an' on'y jist come in? But ye talk ribbish alwis."

"Not quite always," corrected Rachael, very coldly, as she wrapped her unsteady fingers in her shawl; "and if you *do* go out, Shan, of course you'll leave the key as usual."

"Goin' out! Goin' out!" shouted Corr, fiercely. "How ye rant about it! Don't I tell ye once furr all I be stayin' in?"

"Then, when you go to bed, Shan," said Rachael, icily, "leave the key as usual."

"Why wouldn't I?" muttered Shan. But his step-mother had left the house then, and was out of hearing.

For quite two hours he waited in the cottage-kitchen, the outer door locked, and the shutters

closed upon the little show of sweets and toys in the window; then he extinguished the light—the fire had died out long before—and, opening the door, stood for a few minutes looking out into the darkness. His eyes grew accustomed to it presently, and then he turned back, and, without any difficulty, took his gun from a corner of the dark kitchen. With it on his shoulder, he stood to lock the door on the outside, and to deposit the key in its usual hiding-place. Then he walked on, keeping to the road, and getting over the ground but slowly in his excessive caution. As usual, the broken gate at Traveere was half-open, and Corr passed through it easily, without having to remove his gun; but in the rough avenue it was more difficult to walk straight and steady, and to keep perfect silence. Still he knew the ground well, and made his way direct to the spot where he had hidden himself the night before; and there before him, from the exposed and open window, the light came lavishly.

He stood aside a minute where the rays could not reach him, and, resting his gun upon the ground, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead with a torn red handkerchief. Then he stepped cautiously and noiselessly forward,

and looked into the room, through the uncurtained window. A large turf-fire burned in the grate, and just then the old servant, whom Corr knew so well, was piling more turf upon it. On the table before this fire two wax candles were burning clearly, and below them—Shan's loose heavy features relaxed a little now in his supreme content—he saw that Mr. Poynz was writing; for the feather of his pen was plainly to be seen over his right shoulder, as he sat directly in the line of light, with his head bent busily and his back to the open window.

Ah! this was worth waiting for! Was not the darkness even deeper on this night than it had been on the previous one, and the light clearer within; and would not his aim be far surer and easier? By the time the old woman had left the room, his hand would be steady, and there would still not have been time for Mr. Poynz to move. Kitty rose from the hearth and walked towards the door, but apparently her master called her, for she came back to the table, and spoke, evidently in answer to some remark. Then, with the characteristic nod which Shan knew quite well, she went away, closing the door behind her. Corr drew him-

self up after that intent gaze, and stepped back again into the darkness.

There was no need of another minute's hesitation. Kitty was safe in her kitchen; Breen would be asleep in that distant room of his over the stable; Mr. Doyle was far away at Fintona; Dr. Armstrong, if in the neighbourhood at all, would be, with every one else who knew the Englishman, at Kilver Vicarage, and in bed by now. The deepest silence hovered round the old house, and the darkness would make any attempt at discovery or pursuit simply madness in anyone, even supposing——

Shan broke off this thought with a contortion of his heavy lips which might have been intended for a smile, and then raised his gun slowly to his shoulder.

A pause of half a minute—a dark dead pause—and then the firm and heavy touch upon the trigger tightened. A bullet flew straight through the open window; entered the leaning figure; passed through it; struck the wall in front, and made a shivering hole there in the dark old rotten wainscot.

But Corr saw only that it had done the deadly work he had meant it to do, and that the man who had been writing had fallen for-

ward on the table now, and was utterly still—as no human form could be, if life, however feeble, were not extinct.

“Dead enough!” muttered Shan, creeping backwards into the darkness, but keeping his gaze to the last upon the work which he had done so skilfully and effectually. “We shall have no more of his——”

A sudden start and turn, as—in a lightning-flash—he became aware that he was not alone in the confederate darkness. A sudden wrench as he felt a touch upon him, and instinctively tried to shake it off in dread; and the next instant he was pinioned, and half a dozen men stood watching that wild stare of his, into the face of Mr. Poynz, who had been the first to seize the murderer, and was now standing before him in the full light.

* * * * *

“Mr. Poynz,” shouted the lawyer, from the open lighted doorway, as the armed constabulary marched their prisoner down the avenue, “he ought to have come in first to see his victim. Shall the officers bring him back?”

“No,” said Mark, coming up to the door, and wondering much at a strange exultancy in Mr. Doyle's tone, which seemed to him untimely.

"But he ought," the lawyer went on, his voice raised as if he would like it to travel as far as possible. "By all means he should have seen his victim—shot through the heart. A man likes to bring down his game fairly, and always likes to see how dead it falls. Besides that"—the old gentleman's excitement increased now with every word—"his bullet has done further mischief, which I would like him to see. By Jove! his face would have been a study, the rascal, when he saw what good he had done us all, instead of harm. I long to show him how the bullet, which was to have brought down the owner of Traveere, after passing easily through our straw contrivance, sped on its kindly way, and revealed to us the hidden fortune of old Colonel St. George. You look fairly incredulous, sir, as Englishmen always do over everything; but, by all the saints in Ireland, it's true!"

CHAPTER X.

"He lived a poor man, lest a poor he die."

THE Vicar of Kilver had rarely, throughout his whole parochial career, been roused to a state of excitement; but, on the morning after the chance discovery of old Colonel St. George's hidden wealth, his calm and patient little wife caught herself watching him in mute astonishment, as he paced restlessly about the breakfast-room, giving no order for the bell to be rung for prayers, though it was nearly an hour beyond the usual time.

"Perhaps," suggested Mrs. Pennington, a little amused by this conduct, "the girls will not come in until they hear the bell. Nora has been out for hours, I hear, and when Celia finds her, they will probably loiter together until they are summoned."

"All in good time," the Vicar returned, pulling himself up at his wife's side; "Doyle will come down presently. He warned us he should sleep late after such a night. Did you notice, my dear, what spirits he was in? You may depend that, careful as he was not to show it, his guardianship rested heavily upon him so long as Nora was unprovided for."

"How strange it all was!" observed Mrs. Pennington, not by any means for the first time. "I can hardly believe it even yet."

"Nor can I. And I'm sure Nora cannot."

"Oh, Nora will soon adapt herself to her new position!" said Mrs. Pennington, with a smile. "Call to mind how often she has longed for money, and how little she has ever possessed. The wildest of those old dreams of hers seemed easy of fulfilment to her, I daresay, just in that first hour."

"Possibly," allowed the Vicar, reflectively; "yet something else was more dominant in her mind, for I never saw anything more pitiful than her gaze at that ridiculous straw figure, and the shudder that ran through her frame at sight of the spot where the bullet had pierced it."

"It's a pity," observed Mrs. Pennington, in

her simple, practical way, "that the shot should have spoilt a coat; but still——"

"But still," said the Vicar, interrupting her with a laugh, "it did so much good *after* spoiling the coat, my dear, that, if I were Nora, I should have felt more inclined to preserve the bullet, than to turn away from it as she did, with such unutterable repugnance. Dear me, dear me," he continued, repeating his old ejaculation for at least the hundredth time, as he quickened his step again, "what could have induced old Colonel St. George to conceal his savings so effectually?"

"There is no difficulty in answering that," was the prompt and unexpected reply, as Mr. Doyle entered the room through one of the low windows which—like those of the little drawing-room on the other side of the house—opened to the garden. "The inherent suspicion of a miser had a lively time of it, you may depend, in the old man's brain at the very last; for, from what I gathered last night, it would be only on the very night before his death that he hid his hoardings so skilfully behind the wainscot that, but for this attempted murder, they must have remained there undiscovered till Doomsday—or, rather, till the old house fell

wholly, as it fell partially on the night after he had so cleverly effected the concealment."

"But how," inquired Mr. Pennington, stopping in his walk, "can you tell that he did it on that night, or that he suspected any one? Whom could he suspect? He had no one about him but those two old servants—both as honest as they are ignorant—and Nora herself."

"He did not suspect either of *those*," said the lawyer, with a laugh; "but Kitty told us at the time of old Colonel St. George's death, if you recollect, just what she repeated last night—that on the night previous to the fall of the chimney, while she lay awake in alarm, she heard her old master walk many times backwards and forwards between his bed-room and the sitting-room—where we found the money—and that Dr. Armstrong was staying in the house that night, and had had rather a stormy scene with the old man before they separated; especially, I believe, about Nora's going to England. Nora herself told us the rest, and how her grandfather said he had something to confide to her next day."

"Then you think he meant to reveal to

Nora the hiding-place of what by his will she now inherits?"

"I do indeed. I believe for some cause—the pricking of conscience or a grain of real affection for the girl—he had determined she should be rich, and that his pretence of sending her to England was merely to lead Armstrong off the scent, and also entirely to blind Mr. Poyntz as to her possessing a penny. That's my conclusion, Pennington, and I've thought these things well over since dawn to-day. He was a canny old screw, was St. George, but he little thought we should owe to Shan Corr's devilry the possession of his wealth at last."

"I'm afraid," said the Vicar's wife, speaking rather low and timidly, "that Doctor Armstrong will try now, even more than he did at the time of her grandfather's death, to assert his right of guardianship over Nora."

"Then he must fail again even more signally than he failed then," returned Mr. Doyle, promptly. "Until she is of age, I will stick to the task the old man left me. I thought last night how much easier it would be now she is well provided for; but I declare the conviction has since then dawned upon me that a beauti-

ful, restless girl with wealth at her command will be still harder to manage, and will soon bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave."

"I am afraid so indeed," said the Vicar, with a laugh. "I suppose to-day you will have the notes and money counted."

"Yes; but we may be pretty sure they are exactly as they are labelled. Each of the fourteen greasy rolls of notes has *Five hundred pounds* written on the wrapper, and each of the twelve old canvas bags has *One thousand pounds* written on the paper under the seal. The old man *left* it as securely as he had *held* it."

"Did you ever suspect his money was hidden, Mr. Doyle?" asked Mrs. Pennington.

"At one time I certainly suspected that the old iron safe—which he always guarded as the apple of his eye—had secret receptacles; but when I examined it on the day of his funeral, I found my mistake. We had the house searched too, but that, of course, was a mere farce, as there were no articles in it to help concealment. After that I felt sure that the old man's will was either a cruel jest, or the inexplicable freak of one whose brain was affected on the subject."

"Doctor Armstrong, I remember, seemed wonderfully surprised at there being no money in Colonel St. George's safe."

Mr. Doyle glanced round him rather uneasily as Mrs. Pennington spoke.

"Armstrong must have been puzzled *then*, if never in his life before."

"Do you remember," asked Mr. Pennington, presently, "how Corr attempted to get at the safe the day after the old Colonel's death? How little we thought, when we heard that, that another dastardly attempt of his would give the money back to Nora!"

"But won't the law," asked Mrs. Pennington, reflecting, "give it to Mr. Poynz, as it was found on his property?"

The lawyer's laugh was interrupted by Mark's own entrance into the room.

"The English owner of Traveere," he said then, as he shook hands with him, "was the first and heartiest in his congratulations to Miss Nora. And I am very glad he stays in Ireland over to-day, that he may help us in forming some plan for her; because Armstrong will be sure to—By the way, where is she?" he added, pulling himself up hastily.

"Where indeed?" said the Vicar, smiling, as

he rang the bell. "Celia went to fetch her quite an hour ago ; but Celia herself is in such a state of excitement that I would not answer for her summoning anyone sensibly. If Celia owned the wealth herself, she could not be more delighted about it."

CHAPTER XI.

The eyes forget the tears they have shed,
And the heart forgets its sorrow and ache.

LOWELL.

FIRST to that little green seat among the shrubs on the tiny lawn, where she had felt sure she should find her, Celia went in her search for Nora; but the seat was empty, and Celia ran on, and sent a call over the stiff square beds in the kitchen-garden, to the silent dusky little orchard behind. But no answering note came back, and then Celia gazed ponderingly across the bog. Could it be that Nora had gone to her old pet spot beside the river, where the pine had fallen and made that pleasant resting-place in which she had so often waited (long and vainly) for Celia in the old childish days? In her calm, grave moments

Miss Pennington would have hesitated long before walking to this spot before breakfast, for the Vicar's daughter held disobedience as a crime, and knew she should be late for prayers; but this morning everything seemed different to her, because—beyond the bewildering consciousness of her old and often-scorned play-fellow and companion being suddenly changed into a lady of property—there were still the vibrations of those two nights' excitement. And so Celia hardly felt like the decorous little parish priestess she was, and ran across the bog with her hands ungloved and her gipsy hat falling to the back of her head, just as she had many a time rebuked Nora for doing.

When she reached the river, there, sitting among the roots of the fallen pine, her hands clasped round her knee, and her eyes very grave and thoughtful as she looked down upon the water where it crept into the shadow of the little wood, sat Nora.

"At last!" cried Celia, reaching her almost breathless, and leaning beside her to rest. "Why, Nora, I expected to find you running about the bog wild with delight!"

"Why?"

Nora asked this without lifting her eyes

from their long gaze, or unclasping her locked fingers.

"*Why!*" echoed Celia, in most unfeigned astonishment. "Because any girl *would* be wild with delight who had just come into a fortune."

"I forgot," said Nora, smiling a little, but still with the great seriousness in her beautiful eyes.

"And *you* of all girls," Celia went on, her astonishment growing every moment, "I was sure you would be more delighted than even I could be if I were you, because you have never had any money of your own, and always wanted it so badly, and talked so much about having it. How joyfully you used to tell us what you would do if you were rich! You will do it all now, I suppose. Oh, Nora, to think of it! Everything will seem so different to you."

"Everything does—to-day," said Nora, softly.

"Yes, of course," acquiesced Celia, as she fanned herself with her hat, "because to-day you are so differently situated."

"But it was the same yesterday," Nora went on, in her dreamy tones.

"Impossible, dear, for yesterday you knew

nothing about it." But Celia turned her face a little as she fanned it, and looked rather intently into Nora's eyes. "What a wonderful change it will make for you, dear!" she went on, her characteristic staidness beginning to force its way at last through the uncharacteristic excitement. "You will have no need to teach now—and you know you were never very fit for it, were you?—and you can always have pocket-money and beautiful dresses."

"But there are things so—so much more important, Celia," observed Nora, with a little tightening of her locked fingers.

"Yes, of course," assented Miss Pennington, readily; "but you will have whatever you want."

"Then I will have you always with me." But Nora said it without her usual smile or caress; and, while Celia gazed at her in still growing wonder, there was a pause between them.

"Nora," said Miss Pennington, presently, as she tied on her hat preparatory to a proposal to return home, "how little we thought yesterday, when we feared the coming of night, that it would all end so well and luckily! Just to think that that bullet might have——Nora,

dear, how you shiver! I cannot understand your seeming so spiritless, when everything has turned out so fortunately for you. It is just as if—I don't like saying it, though."

"What?" asked Nora, in that grave direct way of hers; though still without rousing herself from her long thought.

"Why, it looks, dear," said Celia, with only a slight hesitation, "so curious, you know. You always spoke delightedly of being rich, as long as it seemed utterly beyond the bounds of possibility; and now that you *have* the wealth, you seem to have no thoughts but gloomy ones. Of course we all know," she went on, with her usual matronly sedateness, "that a terrible crime was averted by Providence, but you know, dear, Mr. Poynz's safety is a thing for us *all* to rejoice over; and his danger did not, after all, affect *you* more particularly than any of us. So I think people will wonder if you let them see that it did. You understand me, don't you?"

"Not—quite."

"I mean, Nora," said Miss Pennington, faltering a little now, as she met the grave, questioning glance, "that, if you are so thoroughly depressed by his past peril—while it evidently

has not depressed him at all—people will say—can't you guess, dear?"

"No."

"Oh, you could, if you thought over it for a few moments!" said Celia, a little impatient, but more with herself than with Nora. "I mean that people will say it looks as if you cared more for him than—you need. You are not angry with me, dear, I hope, for warning you what strangers would say, and just setting you on your guard? You would rather I said it to you than any one else, wouldn't you?"

"No," replied Nora, her eyes brilliant and restless, as she rose from her seat. "I would rather others had said it—strangers that I don't care for; anyone but you, Celia; because I always fancied you liked me, and made allowances for me, and would feel how—— But"—with her fingers pressed upon her eyes for a few moments—"I hardly understand what it was. No, no, don't say it again. What need have we to talk of Mr. Poynz? If"—with a forced, stiff smile—"if he had been killed last night, we should have had a right to speak of him—you and I. But he is safe now, and—and—yes, I understand exactly what you mean. Shall we go back?"

They turned and left the river then, side by side, but in silence, as they had rarely walked before. At last, quite suddenly, as they came in sight of the Vicarage, Nora linked her arm in Celia's, and spoke to her with a laugh—a laugh which told nothing of how those silent moments had fixed in the girl's mind for ever the lesson taught so suddenly and harshly by her friend's few warning words; the lesson a girl can learn only once in her life.

“Celia, how delightful it is to be rich!”

“Oh, at last you are awake to the fact!” said Miss Pennington, thoroughly relieved to hear Nora speak lightly and happily again, and guessing nothing of the childlike, defiant bravery which rose within her, resolved to resist the woman's knowledge of her own heart. “I thought you were never going to acknowledge how pleased you were.”

“Pleased!” cried Nora, rapturously. “I am enchanted, Celia. Oh, how splendid it will be not to have to teach, or economise, or even to study! I never shall study now. I'm not obliged to do so.”

“Oh, I expect you will!” smiled Celia. “You will like it now you are not obliged to do it.”

"I never shall. And I have such wonderful things to do, and places to see; because I have never seen anything yet—have I?—except during that *one* day I had, Celia—that one beautiful day."

"I cannot find out that the Fosters ever took you anywhere of their own will."

"Never. I shall show them now a much pleasanter way of living."

"And serve them out, you mean?" explained Celia. "Quite excusable too, dear. If I were you——"

"You will be—almost," laughed Nora. "I shall go nowhere without you. Oh, Celia, we two will be so happy! The days will be all full of joy, and—*nothing* shall make me unhappy. And, Celia," with a little shake of her head, as if unconsciously discarding some remembrance, "I shall send first for a huge box of things for Rachael's shop, because, when I said she must live with me, she said so decidedly that she would not till I——"

"I heard her," put in Celia, in the pause; "she said not till you married and had a house. She should be only a burden, she said, before that, but afterwards she could serve you well."

"Poor Rachael!" said Nora gently. Then,

in her old happy tones, she went on picturing what she and Celia were to do with her wealth. And when Mark Poynz joined them at the Vicarage gate, the planning was not only not broken off, but Celia even fancied that the promises grew wilder and more startling, as if Nora's eyes had only that moment been *quite* thoroughly opened to the great blessing of wealth.

"Do be quiet, Nora," entreated Celia, her very breath suspended; "you are making *everybody* rich. Remember Tom and Nat can work for themselves, and I don't believe Kitty would be half so happy in that cottage you picture as in her kitchen at Traveere. And Bran won't get well at all, I fear, and Borak—why, of course he's too old to care!"

"Mr. Poynz," said Nora gravely, "will you please let me buy Traveere again, and Borak and all?"

"Do you think," said Mark, and Celia wondered why he still seemed as if he could not be quite kind and glad about Nora's wealth, "that luxury, like a Mephistophelian potion, will make every Faustus young again? Well, let us try; we can but fail at last."

"We will not fail," asserted Nora, lightly.

"Everything will succeed now, and—I am so happy!"

Mark smiled a little. He knew perfectly well that she had hastily substituted those last four words for others which had been half uttered; but he needed no verbal translation of the brilliancy of her eyes, and the swift, sweet smile that curled her lips.

"I suppose, Mr. Poynz," said Celia, simply, "that you think riches are a temptation, and bring troubles of their own, because I noticed you did not look quite so pleased as any of the others did last night, when the discovery of Nora's money was made."

"I had found no treasure," was Mark's cool reply; but even Celia noticed how quickly he turned his eyes at that moment from Nora's face.

"Of course, I am not quite sure yet," said Nora, thoughtfully, "that the money is really all mine."

"Not at all. Lawyers can do anything they like, and they may give it to Borak."

"And," Nora went on, laughing now, "if it is, shall I be *very* rich, Mr. Poynz?"

"So rich that I shall boldly demand a pension, until that coming day when I go down to

the Surrey hospital, and put in my claim for a refuge, as being at last 'fifty years of age and unmarried.' "

"I remember," said Nora, with such pretty nonchalance that neither listener could guess how her heart was beating in the struggle of her new self-knowledge. "Won't it be nice for you? It must be such a very cheerful place, because of course it is for gentlemen who are *afraid* of marrying, and they must feel quite safe and comfortable at fifty years of age."

"Nora," whispered Celia, holding her back a moment as the girls hung their hats in the hall at the Vicarage, "I beg your pardon for saying what I did at the river about Mr. Poynz. I can see how wrong I was, but I can see too that you don't mind. So we are good friends again, aren't we?"

"Good friends?" questioned Nora, earnestly. "Yes, always, Celia, please. You and I will be good friends all our lives, I hope, whatever other friends we make—or lose."

CHAPTER XII.

She must suffer who can love.

PRIOR.

THROUGH many hours during that day, were Nora's plans discussed at the Vicarage; but it seemed as if every proposal must be followed by the recollection of a drawback, and almost more than in the old days of her unnoticed childhood did the girl feel her loneliness just then. But no one guessed this, and Celia was not the only one who said Nora's sudden access of fortune had evidently put the finishing touch to her happiness. Yet Mrs. Pennington once or twice detected a note of sadness in the pretty voice, and Mr. Poynz caught himself looking now and then into her restless eyes, as if he tried to trace some shadow which lay there below their laughter. Sometimes the

girls themselves escaped from these constant debates, and, going out into the garden, ran races with the children, and laughed more merrily than they did; or sat upon the uncomfortable green seat, and formed wild plans of future greatness, until they were called in again, perhaps to hear what was Mr. Doyle's last proposal.

Under whose care was Nora to enjoy the wealth her grandfather had hoarded for her? In whose home was she to spend this first uninterrupted holiday-time of her life? Both the Vicar and his wife joined Mr. Doyle in negativing at once Celia's modest proposal of her remaining with them at Kilver; and Nora herself frankly confessed that she wanted to stay first in England—in London especially—and enjoy what she had so often and so vainly longed to enjoy. And afterwards perhaps she could see those beautiful parts of the world of which she had read and dreamed.

"The notion," Mr. Doyle said, resolutely, in Nora's absence, "of burying at Kilver a beautiful, high-spirited girl who has wealth at her command, could not for a moment be entertained by a guardian who was not utterly insane. She has not seen the world," he went on, "and

she wants to see it. She makes no secret of that; and we must find some means for her to do so now. The least we can do with old St. George's money is to give some pleasure and ease to the girl who was held by him of so much less value. If my own household were not that of an old bachelor, and I had a wife to chaperon her, I would move to London myself, and make a charming home for her there; but personally, you see, I can do nothing beyond advising and superintending."

In the afternoon Willoughby Foster arrived unexpectedly at Kilver, and, in the surprise of seeing him just then (while all their own plans were so unsettled) no one seemed to notice how quickly he must have followed Nora from England. It almost appeared as if he had heard of her fortune, and had come on purpose to lend another voice to their council.

Of course now Nora would go back with him to Great Cumberland Place. His mother would be charmed to have her again, a rich girl who would be—would be the fashion.

"Thank you," said Nora, laughing at the rather lame conclusion of his remark, "but I don't want to go back to Cumberland Place."

"Weren't you happy there?" whispered Will,

as if the alternative had never really struck him till that moment.

"No," said Nora, frankly, "I never could feel at home with your—— I never could feel at home there. And of what use is it to be rich, if I must go back to be solitary in that school-room where I used to study all day long?"

"But you need not——"

"No, I need not," put in Nora, lightly, "so I will not, please."

"Then what do you want, dear?" asked Will, as if any longing beyond what his proposal could amply satisfy, must be an illegal one, which it would be wise to investigate.

"I want one happy Summer," said Nora, standing at the window as she spoke, but not looking out, even when Mark came up from the garden and paused there beside her. "I want Celia with me always; and——" But the wistful glance across at Mrs. Pennington betrayed very little hope of any fulfilment of that last unspoken desire.

"You want one happy Summer?" repeated Will, reflectively. "Is that all?"

"That is all I'm thinking of just now."

"With true Irish philosophy," put in Mark, "you would gladly give your wealth for one

delightful Summer, eh, Miss St. George?"

And she nodded with a smile, for she did not know how near the truth his careless words had fallen.

"Would it do, Mr. Doyle," questioned Nora, presently, "if Miss Archer would manage my house? And, Celia, would you come then and stay with me?"

This was only another proposal to be negatived briefly and decisively. And it was then that an idea was conveyed to Mrs. Pennington, which grew and strengthened into a determination later on that day, when Dr. Armstrong came in. Everyone saw at a glance how the news of Corr's arrest, which he had received in Fintona, had excited him; but they were all yet to see how the further tidings of Nora's fortune could inflame his love and jealousy until his habitual suavity had gone beyond recall.

The old plea of a guardianship—self-imposed—was urged once more; but, under the lawyer's pointed reminders of Colonel St. George's will, that fell at last. Then Dr. Armstrong "recollected" that he had a lady friend in London who would give Nora a home in her pleasant household, or even take her abroad

with her own daughters. Nuel glanced across at Nora as he held out this inducement, because he felt it must be irresistible to the girl who had so long and vainly yearned to see the world; but Nora was only looking with simple astonishment into his white, stiff face, while Mr. Doyle answered briefly that "presently" Nora and he would arrange it all.

"You had better now," said Nuel, addressing the lawyer with curt disrespect, as his efforts failed, "show the letter of trust which you hold."

"There is no occasion at all," was the rejoinder. "It relates to Miss St. George's fortune only, not to her guardian."

"Is it something I ought to know?" asked Nora, with earnestness.

"No, my dear, though the knowledge of it could never hurt you. Under one condition—which is a most improbable one, I'm glad to say—you forfeit your property. That is all."

"And what is the condition, Mr. Doyle?"

"No matter. If I ever see you likely to break it, I will tell you in good time."

"And, if I forfeit the property, to whom does it go?"

"Ladies should never ask questions, and lawyers never answer them. Armstrong, need I remind you that I am sole executor?"

"I have one thing to ask you, Mr. Doyle," put in the Vicar's wife, in her gentle, unruffled tones, and speaking spontaneously, as it seemed—for no one knew of her whispered conferences—"I am myself wishing to spend a month or two in London this Summer. If I take a furnished house, instead of private apartments, will you allow your ward to spend that time with me and my daughter?"

It was with great difficulty that Mrs. Pennington went through this speech successfully, for Celia's astonishment and Nora's delight went far towards making her break down and betray the effort this decision had cost her. But, when Mr. Doyle gave his cordial and delighted assent, and even Willoughby Foster acknowledged that this was the kindest plan of all, her spirits rose again, and she was able to discuss her intentions quite decisively, though gently, when Dr. Armstrong argued subtly in their disfavour.

So it was all decided at last, and Nora never knew that Mr. Poynz had had any voice in the arrangement beyond that promise of his to seek

a house for Mrs. Pennington on his return to town. Then he bade them all good-bye, because he was going back to Fintona that night, and on to London the next day.

"I will find a pleasant house for you," he said, as he took Nora's offered hand; "I will try to satisfy all your tastes and fancies."

"It will be Mrs. Pennington's house," observed Nora, simply, "so I shall be happy there, whatever it is. It is so kind of you to come," she went on, with her hand upon the little lady's shoulder. "But you don't quite hate the thought of it—sure you don't?"

"Sure she does," mimicked the Vicar, smiling at the Irish question. "Didn't you hear her say she knows nobody in London? Then just think how lonely she will be, with only you two girls, and an occasional visit from me."

"You will soon have acquaintances in plenty," observed Mark, with his usual composure.

"You mean you will not let us mope," said Mrs. Pennington, smiling, because she knew how impossible it would be.

But Nora did not trust herself to speak again, and Celia, with dancing eyes, was listening while Will Foster told her that he

should wait in Ireland a few days, that he might escort them all to London.

And then Nuel Armstrong crossed the room to Nora's side, and told her peremptorily that he must speak to her alone.

"I am going to Rachel Corr's; will you come part of the way, then?" asked Nora, with a determination to hide from all who were present her involuntary reluctance to have him with her. Did he not thoroughly belong to her old life, and had he not been her grandfather's friend?

She looked back as they passed through the Vicarage gate, and returned Celia's smile; but Dr. Armstrong—though, keeping at her side, he paused or hurried just as she did—never turned his head. Nor, though he looked straight before him, and had not yet glanced into Nora's face, did he lose the furtive, concentrated expression in his eyes.

So they walked on in silence, until they were nearly half-way across the bog. Then Nora, a little amused by being summoned to a conference and never addressed, inquired rather lazily if Nuel had said all he meant to say.

"It is not often I demand to speak to you

in private now, Nora," he began, his voice as concentrated as his gaze, "but when I do, it is for some purpose, you may be sure. Send back that dog," he added, presently, in her pause. "You attend more to him than to what I am saying."

"You are not saying anything very important yet," remarked Nora, linking her fingers in Bran's collar, as the old dog limped on persistently at her side.

Just as she did so, the blood came hotly and painfully up into her cheeks, because she remembered the last time she and Nuel had walked across the bog with the old sheep-dog at her side. "N-o-r-a." There upon the old brass collar was the name which had been cut on it that night. While her fingers touched it, she turned quite gently to Nuel, as if at that moment the fact shone out clearly before her that this was the last time of all that they could walk so on the old familiar ground. Yet had she not known him all her life? Could she ever recollect a time when Nuel had not asserted himself her guide and Mentor?

"Nuel," she said, thoughtfully, "it seems just as if the old time had gone from me to-day—suddenly—for ever. I don't know why, but

it is so ; and I've no words to say of it, even to you, that might hold it back for only one other hour. But perhaps you have. *Now* I will think more of what you say than of Bran. Poor fellow, I wish he were quite well again."

"I will soon restore him," said Dr. Armstrong eagerly. "Trust him to me, Nora. The Englishman has—very naturally, as you will say—neglected the useless old animals at Traveere. What wonder? A chilly, heartless fellow, who has grown sulky and taciturn now your grandfather's wealth has been discovered, and can only be yours! He grudged you even that, my poor little girl."

"Did you think so?" asked Nora. "But then you didn't see his face when I reminded him that *he* had bought Traveere and everything it contained."

"He took the joke, I suppose," returned Nuel, his tight lips scarcely parted. "Trust a shrewd, experienced man of the world to know how to turn every position to account. But I hope you will never be deceived, Nora, and mistake a false friend for a true."

"I hope not," said Nora, negligently. "Is that all you wanted to say, Nuel?" And, as she asked the question, she stopped, and stood

leaning against an upright cutting of turf, as if she tried to feel that their conference was over, and to prevent his going farther.

"Nora, you recollect that Doyle holds a letter of trust given him by your grandfather?"

"Yes."

Bran had laid himself down at her feet, and her hands were linked before her. She stood the very picture of idle content, Nuel thought, as, under the tilted brim of her hat, he saw the happy dreaming of her eyes.

"Nora," he said—and for a moment his hand went out, as if he would have drawn her to him as he used to do in that uncherished childhood of hers; but in the next his hand fell, and even his eyes turned from her as he spoke—"did you never feel anxious to know something of your parents?"

She turned to him in unfeigned surprise, for had he not for years always silenced her on the subject?

"Oh, Nuel, I long and long to hear of them! Ever since I can remember, my best dream has been to find some one who will tell me of them. You never would; grandpa never would let me even utter in his presence the—the words that

other girls say so often. Father! Mother! I have whispered them to myself in the night, or out here alone upon the bog, but no one ever listened if I tried to win a faint, faint memory to hold in my heart. Have I felt anxious to know? you ask. Ah, you could never, never know *how* anxious! Many and many a night I've cried myself to sleep because I felt I shouldn't know them even in Heaven, because no one could tell me a word about them. Are you—are you going to tell me now, Nuel?"

"If I knew, I would," he said, the dusky colour rising slowly in his face under the longing, questioning glance. "And, as I have long felt that the mystery ought to be traced for you, and you ought to know what your grandfather had no right to keep from you, I am going to do you that service, Nora. No, don't thank me, dear," he added, hurriedly, as he feigned to mistake the sudden question in her eyes; "I will not be thanked for doing a simple duty, for duty's sake. When I have done it, you shall thank me as you will, and repay me as your kind and generous heart dictates. No longer than I can help, shall you live as you are living now, Nora—under a name to which you have no right. No longer," he reiterated, with

slow significance, as she started up with brilliant, flashing eyes.

"What do you mean, Nuel? Speak plainly. I am a little bewildered to-day, and slow—and tired. What did you say about my name?"

"Nothing against it, my dear," Doctor Armstrong replied, with his stiff smile, "for it was your grandfather's, and, of course, your mother's."

"My father's, you mean," Nora corrected, slowly. But her fingers had grown a little nervous now, and she pushed her hat from her forehead, as if its light weight oppressed her.

"That," said Nuel, pointedly—but he looked down while he spoke, as if even then the sight of her emotion could so strangely move him—"is what your grandfather chose that you, and everyone else, should believe; but that was not the truth. Your father's name, for some reason which the old man best understood, was kept secret. Possibly it may have been best to do so; but perhaps there is justice yet to be done to his memory, and I, who love his child so devotedly, will do it. Hush! Don't thank me, darling, till I come to you some day and tell you of your father, bringing you his

name, without a stain upon it of dishonour or of—crime.”

“What?”

The girl's cry was sharp and sudden, as now with both hands she pushed her hair from her temples, and the white fingers clung there as if their hold sustained her.

“Yes,” said Nuel, in a whisper, and he picked up her hat, and stood looking down upon it as he held it in his hands, “though Colonel St. George died in the fullest confidence that your father's name would disgrace you, Nora, it was perhaps only because he did not love you enough to trouble himself to investigate. That is left for me; and to-day, when I heard that at last the wealth is yours which you so well deserve, I determined that your own name should be yours too. I determined that I would restore this to my love, and then I should have no wish unsatisfied; for you would be honoured in the world, as well as wealthy and happy.”

“Perhaps no happier,” put in Nora, low and dreamily, as if she uttered the thought unconsciously.

“But you *must* be happier, dear,” said Nuel, meeting her eyes fully for the first time. “Your

grandfather's name of course is a good and honest name——”

“Yes, he always said so,” Nora remarked, quietly, in Doctor Armstrong's inexplicable pause.

“And you shall bear that till I bring you a still higher. If I cannot find it pure and respected, you must be sorry for me, Nora, for I shall feel, even more keenly than you can do, the disappointment for you. Then I shall lay my own name at your feet, and you will take it, and no one will ever hear from me a secret which is ours alone.”

“Not mine!” cried the girl, passionately.
“No secret that is yours is mine!”

“Then tell the world,” rejoined Nuel, icily, “how your grandfather would not let you be known by (or even mention) your father's name, because he thought it disgraced; but that, as *you* wish and choose to bear it now, you would drag the poor forgotten, discarded name even to the light of a criminal court.”

“That is what—you offered to do.”

“What *I* offer!” cried Nuel, bending to look into her face, with a smile which she did not attempt to return. “My darling, you know me better than that, even in the moments when

you are coldest to me. No, listen a moment, and I will explain what I will do for the one I love so entirely, and have loved so long. You will keep your own name at present, and every one will love and respect it for your sake. But, as it is not yours—as it is not yours,” he repeated, emphatically, while her wide grave eyes were still upon his face, as if she needed their help even to *hear* him, “by any legal right, I shall spend that time in seeking for you the one which *is* your rightful inheritance. If it is stainless, you shall bear it proudly then, my darling. If not, you and I will keep the secret well, and go together from the society which always looks so coldly and cruelly on disgrace. Nora, your grandfather never guessed that I should boldly undertake this commission for your sake; but, my darling, he always wished you to trust your future to me, and died in the full confidence of your doing so.”

“He never said so,” Nora interposed, wearily.

“He said so to me often—almost every time I saw him,” said Dr. Armstrong, his thin lips closing now and then over the slow lies. “Oh, you will obey him, I know, presently, Nora! I shall not hurry you, dear; I have never hurried you, because I felt so sure your grandfather’s

wish would be fulfilled, and you would be mine at last. Not"—his breath grew just the least bit laboured and uncertain here, but Nora did not notice it—"not because it is impossible for you to marry legally and honourably in the name you bear, but because I shall have given you then the truest possible test of a man's love. Nora, if I resign my practice here, with all the old connections and associations; and for the whole Summer pursue this one aim for you, you cannot refuse me my recompense when I succeed. Darling, is not that a fair love-test? Could you yourself give any lover a more trying one? Acknowledge, Nora, that the man who would do *that* must love you beyond measure."

"Yes," said Nora, answering absently, because he questioned her with so cruelly searching a glance.

"And could you do less for your father's memory than give yourself to the man who clears his name from all reproach, and gives it to you? Nora, that is a fair love-test, my darling. Let it be *Yes*, and then see how eagerly I will go to my task."

"And if—anyone else could fulfil it?" in-

terrogated Nora, her eyes far away, and her voice low and troubled.

"I—well, I will stand the chance," said Dr. Armstrong, with a sudden unaccountable buoyancy. "Who else is likely? Young Foster would blunder and fail in the first attempt, Poynz would not attempt it at all. The very suspicion of any degradation attached to your name would prevent his ever raising his hand to help you or yours, for he is only an indolent, self-engrossed man of the world. What is it, darling? Why did you start?" he asked, adroitly intercepting and misunderstanding Nora's impetuous, scornful dissent. "So let him think you Miss St. George still, and then he will remain your friend as much—or rather as little—as he has ever been; though, as I understood from your grandfather, on the night after he had seen Mr. Poynz at Traveere, it is in some way owing to *his* family that your childhood has been so solitary and hard."

"I will ask Mr. Doyle."

For one second the veins rose like cords in Dr. Armstrong's forehead, and the brows came down over his eyes, as a flash of fear and anger darted from them; but in the next he was

laughing a little, and then he answered, in his lightest and easiest tones—

“Ask Doyle with pleasure, dear, if you choose to make this pitiful subject town-talk, and the name of your dead parents a byword. If you think that is how you can best honour them, ask Doyle by all means. Ask old Pennington too; he is even better than Doyle at probing into other men's business, and then laying it open to be piously discussed and ridiculed. Oh! ask them all. Ask Foster; he may not be such a fool as people call him. He may even suggest that his mother protects and pities you, and his sisters bestow their generous patronage on the girl who owns a questionable name! Oh! tell them all—if you think *that* better than being an equal among them, as you are now. But, my dear,” added Nuel, with a sudden change of tone, and as if he feared the words that might pass her lips if he gave her time to speak at all, “it would be useless to ask any of them. I have tried many times, and so skilfully that, if they had known anything, I must have discovered it. No, no one knows, my darling, and, by my will, no one ever shall know, beyond yourself

and me. And when I have given you that test of my love—— What is it, dear?"

"I am going on," said Nora, as she offered him her hand. "You have said all now, haven't you? I'm going on to Rachael, as I told you. No, I would rather you didn't come. There is no need to say more to me to-day; I know it all. I know it as if we had—had stood here for weeks, talking of it all the time. I shall never stand just here again, I hope, as long as I live. Come, Bran."

Blind as he was in his passion for her, Nuel Armstrong was yet too shrewd not to see that he would injure his own cause if he forced his companionship upon her longer; so he bade her good-bye quietly, and forbore to add one other word.

So full was the girl's heart that, when Mrs. Corr met her just within the silent cabin, and, reading some new sorrow in her face, put her arms about her and kissed her—just as she used to do when she was a child,—Nora hid her eyes upon the woman's shoulder, and sobbed out one breathless question.

"Miss Nora," said Rachael, stepping back from the girl's clinging touch, while she spoke fast and nervously, "what cruel, false ideas

have been put into your head? I knew you first—first of them all,—and, if there'd been wrong to know, I should have known it. My dear, you were a baby then; but you were fatherless and motherless—poor little one! Why—why do you try to bring a worse sorrow into your life, my child?"

"Is there no worse, Rachael?"

The tears stood still in her questioning eyes, and Rachael looked away from them.

"I know most and best, my dear," she said, "and you never can have any name but Nora St. George. Isn't it pretty enough? And"—more hurriedly still—"what could have put such dreams into your head, Miss Nora, dear, and you so rich and happy now, and going to have such a beautiful life?"

"Then, after all," said Nora, with a smile upon her tremulous lips, "I may have my happy Summer?"

CHAPTER XIII.

Beauty and light and joy are everywhere.

The Curse of Kehama.

ONE of the prettiest river-side gardens on the north bank of the Upper Thames, and a party assembled there, as radiant and as varied as the myriad flowers among which they sat or strolled. A beautiful picture it was, not only for the fresh young eyes that had never looked upon its like before, but even for the tired ones which had been satiated with brilliance. For, beyond the little crowd of idle human forms, the river flowed in wide and calm serenity; upon the dazzling flower-banks fell the cool shadows of rare old oaks and elms; and even the dresses caught a new loveliness among the roses on the velvet turf.

The latest guests had been welcomed in the

shadowy drawing-room, and led through the open windows to the wide terrace, where games and partners were being chosen; and now Mrs. Pennington, skilfully concealing the fact that she was in an irrepressible flutter of excitement, went from one to another of the little groups of elder guests already scattered among the shady, tempting seats; though, while she talked with each for a time, in her easy, gentle way, she was seeking one familiar face.

"My dear," observed her husband, speaking low, as he passed her, fulfilling—just as easily, and just as gently, and just as well as she did—his own part in this new scene, "your old friend Mrs. Brunton is in the rose-tent, by the river. She would like a few minutes' chat with you alone, I'm sure, after your long separation."

Mrs. Pennington nodded, with a smile of relief, and hastened her steps a little, taking up her long silk skirts by force of habit, and then dropping them swiftly, with a sudden remembrance and a hectic flush. They were very fashionable skirts, and the bonnet that surmounted them was very fashionable too; but Mrs. Pennington—so she was always careful to impress upon her daughter—chose everything

she wore for its "comfort." Fortunately, nothing out of the fashion or unbecoming ever felt "comfortable" to Mrs. Pennington.

"I fancied you would reach this spot eventually," was the smiling greeting she received, as she entered the rose-tent and took her seat beside her old school-friend; "your husband guessed I should like a few minutes with you alone. How delightful it will be to have you in London for a time, Cis! I don't think I ever was so surprised in my life as when I read your letter, which was awaiting me on my return yesterday. I have not quite accepted the story even yet."

"Nor have I," smiled Mrs. Pennington, in her companion's pause. "I cannot even yet believe in Nora's fortune, and can scarcely realise the fact that this house is our present home."

"How beautiful it is!" said Mrs. Brunton, glancing around her. "And so exquisitely arranged both within and without! Some one with perfect taste must have selected it for you, Cis."

"Mr. Poynz did that. He says he chanced to hear of it at once, and had no trouble at all; so I expect he knew the best agents to apply

to, as neither Mr. Doyle nor my husband would have known. We have taken it for the Summer. I fancy Nora will wish to go abroad after that."

"She likes the house, of course?"

"Likes it?" echoed the Vicar's wife, with a smile. "She seems happy here beyond all words. She enters into everything with the freshest and heartiest enjoyment; and yet, with all her merriment, she is so wonderfully soothing. If it is impossible to be dull or depressed in Nora's company, it is equally impossible to be either chafed or weary."

"No wonder that you look upon her as a daughter."

"No, indeed. The only wonder is that she is so glad to be thought so. No one ever could learn from Nora that I was not mistress of this house and of every pound that we spend. And she would not consent to anything but an equal allowance for herself and Celia. Celia was overpowered at first, and could not believe such wealth was really hers; but she was soon infected with Nora's delight."

"Is Nora changed by the change in her position?"

"Not in the slightest," said Mrs. Pennington,

with a laugh. "She just goes on in her old independent, happy, gravely-merry way. I'm sure you could never guess what was the last thing in which she invested. A violin! Yes, you may well smile. She never plays it except in her own room; but I often listen, and, though she is only feeling her way, as it were, and finding out tunes without learning the instrument, you have no idea how pretty it is. She has a concertina too, but I think the violin is the favourite."

"But she plays the piano, surely?"

"Not to content herself, so she never plays to strangers. She plays to herself sometimes, but never really practises, as Celia does, and as girls *must* do nowadays, if they would keep up with the age. She says everyone she hears plays better than she does, so she loses her interest in it. She sings beautifully, though, so it does not greatly signify."

"I think not," said Mrs. Brunton, with laughing emphasis. "Why, Cis, she is even more lovely than report had made me fancy! And that is not usual, for facts lose little in the telling, do they? Her beauty has a most wonderful charm, too, which I cannot yet define. I felt to-day, when I looked into her face, as if it

were a book I longed to read and study, and as if I could enjoy the study hour after hour. Can you understand?"

"Yes. Is that Miss Foster standing by the target, looking round?"

"Yes; I did not know she was here, and I almost wonder at your asking her," said the London lady, a little chillingly. "While Nora St. George was at Great Cumberland Place, I never saw her but once—and that was merely by chance—so little did the Fosters care to give her change or pleasure. They literally buried her in that old school-room for the entire year; and so I wonder that Miss St. George cares for their society now."

"She does not," confessed the Vicar's wife, honestly. "I have had the very hardest work in the world, and failed so far, to persuade Nora to visit them. If she ever does—and they are bent upon our going to a dance of theirs to-morrow—it will be simply to please me and Celia. You see, young Mr. Foster was so long with us, and his sister having visited us too, and Mr. Foster having been a college friend of my husband's, makes us wish to keep up a friendly intercourse. And then Gena Foster is so very urbane to Nora now, and seeks her out so inde-

fatigably, that I think perhaps it will be all right soon."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Brunton, trying to mention as a surmise what she knew to be a certainty, "Miss St. George is *now* to be considered as a suitable wife for the young curate, and to be cultivated accordingly. And probably," she continued, with a little additional acumen, as her eyes were directed towards a group approaching from the target, "a slight hastening of the match, if that be possible, would be a wise step under existing circumstances. How long have you known Mr. Poynz?"

Though surprised a little at the abrupt question, Mrs. Pennington answered without hesitation; and all the more quickly because Mr. Poynz was one of the group coming towards them.

"Well, bear this in mind, Cis," continued the elder lady, in a whisper; "I'm more of a woman of the world than you are, and, beyond that, I'm familiar enough to be almost in the confidence of each party. Genevieve Foster's one aim and desire is to be admired; never mind ulterior motives at this moment. Now and then her eyes have been tardily opened to the fact

that another girl could be as attractive as herself; and Miss Foster has not assisted to make life a bed of roses for that girl. But the effort she is making to win her way *now* is stronger than all her other efforts put together, and whoever stands in her way will not be spared. Ah, Celia, I am glad to see you, dear! How you seem to be enjoying this first season of yours! I and your mother have been having a chat about old times."

"But, Mrs. Pennington," said Miss Foster, looking innocently about her, while the Vicar's wife recovered from the fluttering state of admiration into which she had been thrown by the adroit disjunction of her friend's last sentences, "where are Nora and Willoughby? Not with you? I suppose they have gone wandering off together somewhere. It always used to be the same at home; we never could find Nora and Will."

"When I came down here," observed Mrs. Brunton, holding her hand to Mr. Poyntz for a fading rose which he had idly gathered as he stood, "Miss St. George was impressing frankly upon a party of croquet-players that she did not understand croquet, and would not on any account spoil the game by joining it. Probably

the gentlemen did not believe her, for they would not take her refusal or let her escape."

"She really cannot play," put in Celia; "and she is never ashamed to say what she cannot do."

"But of course you noticed," said Miss Foster, with her surface smile, "that Willoughby was not in that game. Now, Celia, like a good girl, confess where they are, because I want so particularly to win her promise to come to our ball to-morrow. Mrs. Pennington, *you* will come?" she added, while Celia slipped away unobserved (as she thought) to seek Nora and prepare her for this pressing invitation.

"Yes, I will come if Nora does."

"You must tell Nora," smiled Genevieve, bending to whisper it playfully, and half aloud, in her slow sibilant tones, "that Willoughby stays with us over to-morrow night. She will not refuse *then*."

"Beauty is very often eccentric, like genius," observed Mrs. Brunton, placidly; "for I remember that your brother was one of the most eager in trying to make her join that game of croquet—on his side."

"Still she felt pretty sure," said Genevieve, unbaffled, "that he would leave it when she

did. Mrs. Pennington, will you ask Mr. Poynz"—with a playful backward glance into his face—"to take Celia and myself up the river a little way in your boat, some time to-day?"

"I will take you all," replied Mark, readily, "but I must take you one by one. It's a trifling condition, considering how low the tide is, and how high the thermometer."

By this time Celia had found Nora busily playing Badminton, but the game was ended just then, and Nora left her place instantly at Celia's quiet summons.

"I wasn't very stupid at that," she said, shaking her head, with a laugh, when they walked away. "I suppose a long solitary course of a home-made battledore and shuttlecock on the bog, years ago, paved the way for this. Oh, Celia, isn't everything pleasant? Where's Mr. Foster?"

"I don't know," replied Celia, never guessing that Nora had hoped he was with her, but only recalling Miss Foster's words: "I should have thought you would know. Gena is with mamma, though—and that's why I came for you, Nora. She wants a promise that we will all go to her ball to-morrow, and I was afraid you might refuse hastily and be sorry afterwards."

"No, I should not be sorry afterwards."

"But, Nora, you will go?" pleaded Celia, with a little heightening of her usual colour.

"No, never! She was unkind for a whole year—I don't mean to myself. I wouldn't think much of that, for it isn't worth it—but to Miss Archer, who had nothing in her life but work or loneliness and—— No, I mustn't think of it," she added, suddenly, "especially when the Fosters are here. But—but, if they could have told me where she is now—if they had only taken even *that* interest in her, and not let her fade out of all our lives, and think that no one cared for her! I was going to work and help her; and, now that I could help her so easily, I may not. Oh, how could they let her hear I was rich, and yet forget to give her my letter, and let her go where we cannot find her?"

"Oh, we will find her!" said Celia, in her staid, soothing way. "Mr. Foster promised to get the address. you know."

"He promised, but he has never done it. Men ought to keep their word always—even if women don't."

"What is the difference?" asked Celia, gently. "Besides Will is sure to succeed at last. He is

so very anxious to do what he can to please—you, Nora."

Something in the tone struck Nora sadly.

"Will is very good," she said, quite honestly, "and likes to please us all."

"And you will go to-morrow?" pleaded Celia, returning hopefully to her charge. "Miss Foster is so particularly gracious to you."

"What is *gracious*?" questioned Nora, thoughtfully. "Do you mean sorry about Helen Archer, or about—anything?"

"She seeks you out constantly," pursued Celia, avoiding any direct reply to the last question; "and it looks ungenerous in you to hold back, now you are a more important person than she is; and of course you need never be more than just friendly. You know papa and Mr. Foster were such old friends; and mamma does so wish you to be friendly, Nora, because, you see, Will was like one of us at home for so long."

"I will go," said Nora, quietly. "If you all wish it, that's quite enough, for you have been very kind to me. But I will not promise what I either will or will not say to Genevieve Foster."

"Oh, no fear of your offending her!" smiled

Celia. "Now, Nora, will you go on alone to the rose-tent, because I don't want them to know I fetched you, and they would see us in another minute."

So, when the little group in the rose-tent heard an advancing step, and looked round, expecting Celia's return, the figure that they saw alone, looked so different from Celia's, that probably that was why their eyes rested so long upon it.

"Nora," exclaimed Will Foster, pondering what it was which struck him afresh each time he saw her, "what an exquisite dress yours is ! And—surely I can never have seen you in a bonnet before to-day?"

"Is it a bonnet?" asked Mr. Poynz, examining, in his leisurely way, a matchless white result of millinery skill and taste.

"Does it make me look different?" asked Nora, with anxious eyes. "I was afraid so, when Mrs. Pennington laughed at me and called me *gorgeous*. I didn't want it to be showy at all : and when Celia tried it on it looked so quiet and pretty."

"Is it possible?" queried Mark, sceptically. "And did Miss Pennington try on the dress ? And did that look quiet—and even pretty?"

"Of course my dress couldn't look little and nice, like Celia's," said Nora, laughing, "though we thought they were the same. Don't I recall to your mind Barbara Allan's last request, 'Oh, make it long and narrow'?"

"I suppose by now, Miss St. George," observed Mrs. Brunton, looking quizzically up at her, "you are getting used to being a good deal looked at—in the park especially."

"Nora likes the park," laughed Will, without understanding the proud little flush in Nora's cheeks, "though she did tell me once, in confidence, that it was something like going round and round the board in a game of steeple-chase, and that the people did not look a bit more lively than the tin horsemen."

"Still I like it," said Nora, lightly. "I can often see little poems and histories there; and then the park itself is always beautiful."

"And the costumes," added Mark.

"And the costumes—yes. One of the many things which I shall never understand is, why the ladies who can wear such marvellous costumes do not look happier in the face."

"When you have a leisure afternoon to give me," said Mark, "I will drive you where you

will see hundreds of happy faces—if you don't mind many of them belonging to poor, hard-working people."

"I mind!" cried Nora, with laughter in her eyes. "Haven't I been as poor as any of them? And am I different now in any way, except that—that money was found for me? I shall be very glad to go."

"Will it be where people like ourselves go, Mr. Poyntz?" inquired Genevieve Foster.

"People very like ourselves will be there when we go," laughed Mark, "but perhaps not many of the 'upper ten,' Miss Foster."

"Oh! Celia," said Nora, with a sigh of real pleasure, "aren't you glad *we* are not in the 'upper ten'?"

"Suppose you woke some day and found you were?" interrogated Mark, looking curiously into Nora's face.

"I should try to go to sleep again."

"No, you would not," he contradicted. "You have had a far greater surprise than that, and you fit your third destiny as easily and well as you did your first and second. If the next is a higher one, you will fit it just as gracefully."

"I am sure so," said Will, more with boyish

enthusiasm than a skilful choice of words. "Whatever you are, Nora, you will be the fashion; won't she, Celia? Everybody talks of her."

"It is a pity," said Miss Foster, slowly, as she pressed the stick of her parasol into the turf, "for any English lady to be talked about."

"Yes," assented Nora, readily, "so please don't talk about me."

"Oh! Mrs. Pennington," cried Genevieve, with a sudden change of tone, as the two elder ladies came from their rose-covered seat, "you have promised to bring Nora and Celia to our dance to-morrow, haven't you?"

"I would rather not, thank you," began Nora, impulsively; but then Celia's words came back to her, and Mrs. Pennington's eyes persuaded her; and so she said, in that grave, simple way of hers, "I wished at first not to come, Miss Foster, so perhaps you would rather withdraw your invitation?"

"Oh! certainly not. And, as Willoughby is staying, I am sure you have changed your mind."

"I haven't changed my mind at all," said Nora, meeting Miss Foster's chilly, smiling

gaze; "but, as Mrs. Pennington wishes it, I will change my decision, and go with her to Great Cumberland Place."

Something in the tone in which the last words were uttered made Celia sorry for the moment that she had tempted Nora to this decision; but in the next instant this was forgotten, for she was walking up the garden at Will's side, and there were no pauses in his lively discourse.

"Miss Nora," said Mark, skilfully managing to loiter at her side behind the rest of the party, "Doyle has commissioned me to get you a pair of ponies to drive, if you will care for them."

"Oh! yes," cried Nora, with delight. "But —am I to drive them *only* in the park?"

"I should never drive them there, if I were you; but of course you will take them where you choose. What a large party you have to-day!"

"To most of these friends *you* introduced us," said Nora, "so we owe their acquaintance-ship to you."

"But you do not owe to me the zeal with which they follow up the introduction, and

widen the circle every day. I wish you would never say you owe anything to me."

"Why?" asked Nora, puzzled a little.

"I will tell you why another day," said Mark, with a change of tone, "when I have—as you said to me upon the bog one Sunday night—*gone in for* the widest leap of all. Do you remember?"

"*Did I say it?*" questioned Nora, blushing. "I'm very glad I don't remember."

"Yes. You said, too, on that very same night, that you remembered everything. Yet you see I have eclipsed you, for I remember every word you said to me, both on that night and ever since."

"You must have had a great, great many blank pages in your memory, Mr. Poynz," said Nora, with a smile; but her eyes were soft and liquid, and her lips were just a little unsteady in the smile.

"I had, but they are all filled now; and there is not one which I would consent to part with."

CHAPTER XIV.

As his prisoner there he kept her.

Percy's Reliques.

She answered kindly, but beyond appeal,

No sort of hope for me.

BROWNING.

THE games had all been lost and won. The long, pleasant, dilatory meal, which Mrs. Pennington had already learned to call "high tea"—and which was a necessary adjunct to her garden-parties, because the guests lingered on, and would have famished on strawberries and champagne alone—was over; and now those guests who had not left were resting in the seats upon the terrace, talking quietly and idly; as they looked down upon the river, flowing softly on, beyond the trees and the arches and the colonnades of roses.

"Nora," whispered Willoughby Foster, stopping her as she crossed the terrace, after fetching a book which Mrs. Brunton wished to see, "I've brought a new cord for the rudder of your boat. You will come with me to put it on, won't you?"

"Of course," assented Nora, promptly. "Did you forget you had it until now?"

For some reason or other Will did not answer this question, as they walked down to the river; and, looking at him, anyone would have judged his thoughts to be much more upon the state of the tide than upon the cord he had brought from the house. The little boat was out upon the water this evening, swaying softly and enticingly upon the incoming current.

"Sit in your own place for one moment, Nora," young Foster said, "while I stand here upon the steps and run the cord through; then you can judge of its length."

He took her hand, and held it until she was comfortable in her seat; and then he put the rope through the rudder and laid the two ends in her lap.

"Just try it for two minutes," he said; and, stepping down into the boat, he put off from shore without a pause. But he colour-

ed painfully when he met Nora's questioning, laughing glance, for she evidently thought just then that the unmooring of the boat had been a mistake.

"Two minutes!" she said, presently, as he pulled hard against the tide, with his head bent and his lips closed. "We have been twice two minutes, Mr. Foster."

"Isn't it a lovely evening?" he asked her, hurriedly; "and lovelier upon the water than anywhere. I will take you back in a few minutes, Nora; but let me have a taste of exercise, and you a taste of rest."

So, not at all unwillingly in the calm Summer evening-time, she leaned back in her cushioned seat, and looked round upon the peaceful scene on which the slanting sun-rays lingered; and she never noticed how hard and fast Will Foster worked for his own purpose. But when at last he laid down his sculls, and the boat began to drift slowly homewards with the current, her eyes were suddenly opened to the new intense earnestness upon his usually happy face.

"You are not a very clever oarsman," she said quietly, though her heart began to beat as she remembered how fast he had brought her from home, and how she had involuntarily al-

lowed him to do so, while she dreamed the time away; "not at all clever indeed, Mr. Foster, or you would keep your sculls and sit back upon your seat."

"I don't want to seem clever this evening, even to you," returned Will, with rather a forced smile. "I want to seem only what I am, Nora—very much in earnest, dear, in what I am going to say to-night, because I've so often tried and failed."

"Please fail this time too."

"I cannot," he said, "and his hands were tightly clasped as he leaned forward with his elbows on his knees. "My heart is too full to-night to be silent. Nora, I love you so dearly that surely you will give me one little promise to care for me in return. I cannot expect such love as I feel for you—though even that may come in time—but promise me you will try to care for me a little, Nora."

"I do," responded the girl, gravely. "I care for you a little now—more than a little, for I can never forget what companions we were years ago, both in mischief and out of mischief, or how you have been my friend ever since—but I can never care for you more than I do to-night; and that is only as a friend."

"But you will feel differently, Nora darling. Surely—surely you will accept me some day?"

"I shall never change to you, Will," she said, very gently. "I am as sure that I shall never like you *more*, as I am that I shall never like you *less*. Please let things be as they are. Life is so pleasant now."

"But things cannot always be as they are," cried Will, with rising vehemence. "It is not to be supposed that you will not marry—you of all girls."

"I cannot yet; perhaps I never can."

Nora said it with a strange, quiet sadness, and her face had grown very white. But, when she met her companion's blank incredulous gaze, she smiled a little, and her own friendly, easy manner came slowly back to her.

"Of course you will marry!" persisted Will. "Why, everybody wants you now!"

"I shall not marry everybody."

"I'm sure," the young man went on heavily, "no one could be so devoted to you as I am, and have been since—I was going to say since I went back to Ireland and found you grown up—but—but I declare," he added, ruefully, "I don't believe I can remember a time when I was not devoted to you."

"I do. I remember when you wouldn't carry little Larry Hogan home from Fintona on your back, *though* I asked you."

"I cannot laugh," fretted Will, "even at the memory of that truant day of ours, when we stumbled across little Larry in the dark as we came home. No, I remember I wouldn't carry him, for he was a muddy little object; but I would now, Nora, at the slightest hint of yours, and in my best clothes too. Do listen, dear, and tell me you will try and like me enough to marry me. Don't always jest."

"I don't think I always jest," said Nora, while, lighted by one swift ray of thought, she saw not only her isolated youth, but a possibility of a shunned and isolated age. "I am not jesting now. But see how pleasantly we glide with the stream. You could not change the boat's course without making everything less pleasant, could you? So why should we disturb it."

"But just look your future seriously in the face, Nora dear," pleaded the young curate, his voice full of trouble. "In the natural course of things your solitary drifting will be disturbed, as you say. So why not choose now who shall——"

"Disturb it?" put in Nora, laughing, though her cheeks again had grown very pale. "No, not this Summer, please."

"I have loved you always," reiterated Will, going back to his one strong argument, "though since you have been rich I have not liked to tell you."

"I thought not," returned Nora, demurely; "so you are trying now, just to please me. But I like silence best."

"If I keep silence, some other fellow——"

"I should not listen if he did," said Nora, with a simple assurance which solaced him infinitely. "I want this Summer for—myself."

"Nora, do you really mean this?" whispered young Foster, after he had moored the boat at the garden-steps, and was offering her his hand. "Will no one be—be more successful than I have been, until you have had all this Summer as a holiday?"

"No; no one."

"Well, I'm thankful for that at any rate," he said, with a sigh of great relief. "What's the matter, darling? Cold? What a selfish bear I have been to keep you out upon the water in that thin dress! Who would guess, after my carelessness, that I loved you so dearly?"

"Oh, Will," breathed Nora, with intense earnestness, "there is so much happier a life possible for you, if you could only see!"

"I shall see you to-morrow—you promised to come?" he questioned, hastily, as he feared each moment would be their last together.

"Would not it be better for me not to go?"

"If you did not, I should not stay there; though I dare say there will be no getting near you in any case. Oh, Nora," he said, the trouble coming back to his voice, "I cannot give you up! I felt so confident of winning you—in time, at any rate. I'm sure they all think at home that you will accept me; so does Celia. And I'm sure Mr. Poyntz does."

"Does he?" questioned Nora, very quietly.

"Yes, I'm sure he does. He always knew how I loved you, and he hoped you would marry me."

"Did he tell you he—hoped it?"

"Often," asserted Will, his thoughts far away from Mark as he spoke, and quite unconscious of the weight of his words. "Oh, dear, how soon we have reached them all again!"

"*On the water!*" repeated Genevieve Foster, with a laugh, as Nora accounted for her absence to Mrs. Pennington. "Without a shawl too,

and so late ! Well, I always did say Will could persuade you into anything."

"Except *into* the water," rejoined Nora, quietly.

CHAPTER XV.

LYSANDER.—Ah me! for aught that ever I could read,
 Could ever hear by tale or history,
 The course of true love never did run smooth.

* * * * *

HERMIA.—If, then, true lovers have been ever cross'd,
 It stands as an edict in destiny:
 * * * It is a customary cross;
 As due to love as thoughts, and dreams, and sighs,
 Wishes, and tears.

YOUNG Foster's prophetic complaint that he should not be able to get near Nora, if she did keep her promise and go to his mother's ball, seemed to him fulfilled, when he looked eagerly about the rooms, after his imperative duties as gentleman of the house had been accomplished. Since he had received Mrs. Pennington's party on their arrival, he had only now and then caught a passing

glimpse of Nora, and had been obliged to rest satisfied with that during his duty dances, and while he performed—good-humouredly, if not patiently—the necessary task of introducing suitable partners, and luring congenial idlers into each other's society. But now the weight of this responsibility was lifted, and Will set out on his search for Nora. There was not an unlimited area to search, but there were numerous interruptions to be encountered; so that the dance which he had hoped to obtain had begun before he reached the spot where he had last seen Nora resting. He could therefore only stand and watch her through the quadrille, his round, unclouded eyes very full of admiration as they rested on her, and of amiable envy when they were directed towards her partner.

"I don't believe Poynz hates dancing so much as he pretends," he said to himself, with a smile. "I remember well his telling me that no man in his senses danced in June; yet there he is, not looking bored at all. But," added Will, meditatively, "I don't see how anyone *could* be bored with Nora. Even if she doesn't utter a word, her eyes are always speaking. I wish this stupid dance were over."

Even when the "stupid dance" was over, there was little consolation for Will. He saw Nora claimed from Mr. Poynz before they had crossed the room after the quadrille, and he bit his lip with vexation as he made his way to Mark.

"It's too bad of Nora," he began, with his usual honest monopoly of interest. "Had she promised Graham the next dance?"

"Yes."

"Yet she would not engage herself to me for any special ones; she would promise me only the first I asked her for, *if* she should happen to be disengaged. I see no chance of that now. I believe she did it on purpose."

"Why should you believe that?" inquired Mark, as his eyes followed the different couples going past to take their places for the dance.

"I wish I could tell you," replied Will, longing for the relief which it had always been to him to tell his personal grievances to this one friend; "but you would be bored more than by dancing."

"Impossible."

"Or you would laugh, and that I could not stand just now."

"Then I know what you mean without your telling," put in Mark, in his quiet, leisurely

way. "You have been assuring Miss St. George that no other man in the world adores her as you do, or is so capable of adoring her; that no one else would lead such a miserable life without her as you would lead, or be so deliriously happy as you would be if—Pooh! it's the old formula. I know it well enough without your telling me."

"But—step aside with me a moment, Poynz—you have no idea how strange she was; I really could not understand her," added poor Will, his face falling as he recalled those anxious minutes through which he and Nora had drifted with the stream. "She did not seem as if she intended ever to marry, or change the life she is living now. Of course that is an impossible idea, isn't it, Poynz? She will have other offers presently, and so, I suppose, gradually that childish notion will pass away. But I hope and trust she will remember who was her first lover, and who first asked her for her love. Then I shall not care."

"For what?"

"For having been kept waiting, or even for having been once refused. Nora is still very childish in many things, and perhaps she has

the childish fancy that, if she were engaged, she would not feel so utterly unfettered in her enjoyment as she does now. That is the only way I can explain it to myself. What do you think?"

"That Miss St. George acts thoughtfully in everything, whatever her 'childish fancies' may be. If she has declined your hand, Will, I see no prospect of her changing towards you when another man offers her his. That other men *will* offer it, we who know her can safely guess; but to each one I think she will speak only the truth, however her gentleness may try to soften it. And so, however cruel that truth would be to hear, I should accept it, and hide the smart."

"You mean if you were I?"

"Decidedly I mean if I were you. You asked me what I thought, you know. I'm sorry you did: I'm sorry you told me this at all."

"Why?"

"Why?" echoed Mark, with a ring of contempt in his voice. "Because a man should carry his heart within him, and fight his——"

Mark broke off abruptly here, for one glance into young Foster's face had reminded him of

the difference between their natures, and of the fact that, eagerly as Will sought sympathy in everything, Mark himself was the only friend from whom he had ever sought it on this one subject which was nearest to his heart.

"We all venture a heavy stake when we give our heart into a girl's keeping," he said, lightly, "and our eyes are opened to the chances of loss. We stand them voluntarily, and we have only ourselves to blame for our defeat."

"I expected you to say when we 'make fools of ourselves by falling in love,'" observed Will, with rather a grim smile. "But you have not lately spoken so cynically of love as you did some time ago."

"Did I?" inquired Mark, negligently. "Or have you mistaken the subject a little? Don't you think the dance is nearly over now?"

"It's sure to be. Thank you for reminding me, for I should have gone on mooning here. I wish I could be as indifferent and independent as you are, Poynz—I do indeed," he said, pathetically; "but it is impossible to give up Nora after having loved her so long, and feeling so sure she cared for me too. I'm afraid we ought not to have shirked this dance, you and I, but it has been a relief to tell you—even,"

added Will, honestly, "though you have not helped me at all."

Without looking after him, Mark sauntered on, to choose a partner for the next dance if he must, to take refuge in a cooler spot if he might. With all his love and eagerness written on his face, Will came up at last to where Nora sat resting for a few moments on Mrs. Pennington's couch, and laughingly shaking her head to all the entreaties for her card.

"It is quite filled except the last line," she said, with a frank nonchalance which is rather rare in ball-room experience, "and I want to leave out that dance."

"For me?" interrogated Will, excitedly.

"No: I mean leave it out altogether; because, unless Celia is enjoying herself very much, we are going home after the last but one. Still, if Celia wishes it, we shall stay, and then I may as well dance it as not."

"Then promise it to me, Nora, and I will stand my chance."

"No," she refused, with a persistency which amused even herself, "I would rather not."

So, gradually, those who had waited for her promise moved away, seeing no prospect of it; and, though Will's triumph was beyond bounds

when he first discovered that she had reserved the next dance for him, it was sobered a good deal by the further discovery that she intended to give him only that one.

"I wish it could last all night, as it is the only one we are to dance together," he whispered, when they stopped.

"How tired we should be—both of the dance and of each other! Look, Mr. Foster! Isn't Celia pretty to-night? She is always pretty; but I mean, doesn't she look very pretty now?"

"I don't know," Will, answered, moodily, as he felt that in another minute or two she would have left him. "Come and see if there is a little air on the stairs; I cannot criticise anybody."

"You never were an observant character," remarked Nora, standing against the banisters, and using her fan with unconscious coquetry, as she looked about her with lovely, untired eyes.

"You insinuate that the fact was established in your mind long ago, dear."

"So it was. The fact—like the business of a certain shoemaker in the Tottenham Court Road—has been 'established from time immemorial.'"

"Really, Nora," laughed Will, as he stood

before her, with eyes for nothing beyond her face, "why should you ever notice common things like that? No one would believe it who looked at you to-night; you look so perfectly lovely."

"Celia's dress is exactly the same," put in Nora, carelessly watching Genevieve Foster as she came from the drawing-room alone.

"I don't believe it," asserted Will, bluntly, "except in its being white." And by that time his sister had come up, and playfully touched him on the shoulder.

"You two are always together," she said, without lowering her voice, "and always have some quiet little joke between yourselves. I suppose none of us may share it. Look how we come straggling up! Tory, isn't it too bad that Willoughby and Nora have always some nice little jest which they will not let us share?"

"You may share it, Miss Foster," said Nora, her gaze full and clear upon Genevieve's smiling face. "Very few jests bear repeating, though, even when they are born in the purple, and ours was not. It had its origin in the Tottenham Court Road. Do you happen to know that rustic promenade?"

"Scarcely—as a promenade," replied Gene-

vieve, trying to look amused, but succeeding only in looking supercilious. "For a lady, Miss St. George, you have certainly shown yourself extraordinarily fond of curious and questionable localities. Your few weeks' experience of London ought to put residents like ourselves to the blush. Don't you think so, Tory? Mr. Poyntz, can you imagine what benefit or pleasure such experience would have for Miss St. George?"

"It has had none *yet*," said Nora, calmly intercepting his reply, and very steadily now meeting Genevieve's shallow smile. "I have tried to meet Miss Archer, and, as you know, I have never succeeded."

"Very possible indeed," assented Miss Foster, coldly. "If Miss Archer had not particularly wished to be lost sight of, she would have sought you, I've no doubt, considering how you always singled her out as your most valued friend. So you may be very sure that she has a reason for keeping herself in the background. If, therefore, the motive for your eccentric walks and drives is to discover *her*, let me advise you to discontinue them."

"Surely, Nora," put in Victoria Foster, marvelling at Nora's evident determination to be

silent, "you must feel very glad that we never told her of your being rich; for now you have had your eyes opened to her real nature. If she had known you were wealthy, she would have kept up the acquaintanceship indefatigably, and you would never have suspected her of time-serving, and of not being what she seemed."

"Sometimes," said Nora, looking from one sister to the other, with a glance almost of amusement in her beautiful eyes, "it is pleasanter to know each other only as what we *seem*. As for Helen Archer, I love her too well to argue in her favour here. I would mention her name only where it is remembered gratefully and tenderly, as I myself remember it."

"No one who ever knew Miss Archer could remember her but with pleasure and respect," put in Mark, coolly, and looking a little amused at the glad swift smile which chased the short-lived scorn from Nora's lips. Then he stood back, while a gentleman hurried up to claim her for the dance that was just beginning.

"I don't really mind Nora's peculiarities at all," said Genevieve, addressing Mr. Poyntz in a low voice, as she passed into the drawing-room at his side, and glancing up at him with a smile as she spoke, "but girls who are likely to be-

come sisters at no distant date get into an honest, friendly way of speaking now and then. You would understand, Mr. Poynz, if you had sisters of your own."

"Should I? I never remember desiring any sisters of my own."

"We shall be very glad to welcome Nora among us," continued Miss Foster, wondering a little uncomfortably at his reply, while still she could cautiously pursue her own course, "because she has really some good qualities when you know her pretty well. At any rate, Will is sure she has, and we are quite willing to take them on trust."

"Whether or not your brother is so inexpressibly fortunate as to win Miss St. George for his wife, Miss Foster," Mark said, proudly, but very earnestly, "you have no need to take on trust the noble and charming qualities which the very dullest of us must see that she possesses. Miss Pennington has promised me this dance, and I see her now. Ours is the next, is it not? Ha! I did not know that Dr. Armstrong was to be here to-night."

"He was not sure he would be in London," explained Genevieve, with a triumphant glance across the room at her sister, "but I fancied he

would arrange it somehow. How late he is, though!"

If during the early part of the evening Will Foster had, as he said, found it hard to get near Nora, Nuel Armstrong, after his late arrival, found it far harder. Wherever Nora paused between the dances, a little crowd seemed closely to gather about her.

"Never mind, dear, you will not find it so except at a dance," whispered Mrs. Pennington, wasting her consolation, for Nora enjoyed it all. "It is the penalty you pay for dancing so perfectly, and looking—as you look."

So dance after dance went on, and Dr. Armstrong sought Nora in vain, and hid his discomfiture as he best could, while he suavely repaid Victoria Foster's endeavours to entertain him. But, when the ball was nearly over, he followed her and her partner to their place in the quadrille, and stood there to demand the last dance. In all her surprise, Nora refused him very quietly and gently.

"I have declined that dance before," she said, the delicate colour deepening a little in her cheeks.

"Then I must claim the one after this," he persisted, below his breath. "It is the last but one; give me that, Nora."

"I cannot; I dance it with Mr. Poynz."

The opening bars of the figure were played before Doctor Armstrong had turned away, and just then Celia started a little at her partner's side, for she had caught Nuel's angry, menacing glance.

"Is the last for me too?" asked Mark, when the dance was over, and he and Nora stood resting in the open doorway.

And then she blushed a little, because it had been in the vague anticipation of that very question that she had kept herself free for the last dance—until Nuel's demand had made it impossible for her to join it.

"I cannot dance that at all now," she said, simply, "even if we stay. I would like to, but I refused Doctor Armstrong, so I must refuse everybody."

"As you refused Foster at supper-time. Why was that?"

"Because his sister took it so thoroughly for granted that I would not."

"That's a sublime reason."

"Don't Celia and Mr. Foster dance well together?" inquired Nora, thoughtfully watching them. "Did you notice?"

"No."

"I think it will be so nice if they grow fond of each other."

"When we can arrange those things for each other," said Mark, his dark cheeks reddening a little and his voice low and stern, "the world will go very smoothly and agreeably, I have no doubt. It is such a very easy matter to reduce loving into liking. Ask Will to-day—ask me presently, when I have learnt the lesson, and stand stricken by the blow. It is such an easy matter to tear a thousand clinging tendrils from a man's heart, and hide the scars they leave!"

"Mr. Poynz," asked Nora, very low and wistfully, "who told you of—why do you speak so of Will to-night?"

"*He* told me," Mark answered. "We are old friends, and he told me of his disappointment."

"And you were sorry?"

"Very sorry—for him."

"And for me?"

"I don't know yet;" and, as he spoke—she looking at him—his gaze rested by chance upon Nuel Armstrong.

"I see," she said, her low pretty voice quickened by disdain. "You hesitate to say you are sorry, because you picture another fate for me."

"Doctor Armstrong has not a very brilliant expression of countenance to-night," observed Mark, lazily. "He looks as if he thought us all patients in a bad way."

"Victoria likes him."

"Miss Foster is a sensible and charming girl—far too wise to see suitors following and not look behind. What a happy thing it would be for us if girls universally acted so! There sweeps a glorious feeling of rest across a man's mind at only the bare idea of it."

"I should have thought that it would have been far less trouble for you when they did *not* look behind. You need not even be aware of their existence then."

"That," returned Mark, dryly, "is the one mistake we make. Doctor Armstrong sees you now, and will be here in a few minutes. My—my child, are you so tired? Do you wish to go home?"

"Oh, no!" said Nora, laying the swans-down of her fan against the cheek next him, as if to hide its sudden whiteness from the keen eyes above her, and quite determined not to leave while Celia Pennington was unequivocally enjoying herself. "But I have been thinking all the evening how I should like to go into the old

school-room for a minute. I have never been there since Helen and I parted ; and I may have no other opportunity, for I don't feel as if I should ever be here again."

"And you have not yet had the moment's freedom given you," said Mark, and he seemed only to be glancing idly into the rooms before him. "If you go now I will not let anyone follow you.. No one is looking at this moment, Miss Nora. Run down-stairs while you are safe. I will summon you if you stay too long ; but the rest will do you good. Not a moment too soon," he added, mentally, when he turned from watching Nora out of sight, and received the slow and formal bow of Doctor Armstrong.

CHAPTER XVI.

Although men are accused for not knowing their own weakness, yet perhaps as few know their own strength.

SWIFT.

ALWAYS anxious to avoid Dr. Armstrong when he could do so with ease, Mr. Poynz turned away now, and sauntered into the drawing-room; but Nuel followed, with a quicker and quieter step, and, at the first opportunity, addressed him suavely—

“I miss my cousin, Miss St. George; do you happen to have seen her lately?”

“I had that pleasure within the last few minutes,” Mark answered; “but she was tired, she told me, and would go away to rest.”

“She had no appearance of fatigue, and I shall be glad to find her as quickly as I can.

Of course, as she was with you, you know who took her away."

"Not myself," replied Mark, in his easy, courteous way, "nor did I follow her, as she told me she wished for rest."

With no evidence of having at all comprehended the hint conveyed in those last words, Dr. Armstrong turned back to the lobby, and Mark—without glancing again in his direction—passed on, in the margin of the dance, to where Mrs. Pennington sat, in the inner room.

"If you wish to leave, Mrs. Pennington," he said, taking a seat beside her, "I will order your carriage."

"I am quite ready," she answered, turning full willingly from a cynical-looking old gentleman on her other side, "but I would not hurry the girls. Willoughby Foster has just been describing their enjoyment to me as 'immense.' I felt sure they would enjoy the dance, though I could not help being a little nervous as to Miss Foster's reception of Nora—and, indeed, Nora's treatment of Miss Foster. I am very unwilling for there to be any estrangement between the families," she went on, in his silence; "yet, I should not have urged Nora to come, had not Miss Foster been so bent upon having

her. I don't care to go into her reasons, as Mrs. Brunton does—I never could understand motives that are not on the surface—but, though I am very fond of Willoughby, and wish to be fond of his family, I think Miss Foster would have shown more tact by leaving Nora alone. That is all she wishes. If they were unkind to her during her residence here, she never alludes to it; but she makes no secret, certainly, of wishing Genevieve to leave her to herself.”

“This is Miss Nora's first ball, is it not?”

“Yes, but others are to follow for her, as of course you know, Mr. Poynz; and probably she will soon be tired of them. No one would imagine that possible to-night, though, looking at her,” added the little lady, meditatively. “Nor, I think, would they easily guess that this was her first experience of such a scene. She seems to understand etiquette by intuition.”

“The etiquette which needs to be taught,” said Mark, quietly, “is but a poor substitute for natural grace and refinement.”

“And I suppose,” added Mrs. Pennington, with an affirmative nod, “that Nora could never have acquired by study that unconstraint and ease of hers which make people watch her so. I laughed just now when some one spoke of

her as 'elegant.' I could not fit that word to Nora's unconscious grace. Did you ever notice, Mr. Poynz, how curious it is to hear a stranger's new opinion of some one who has grown as familiar to us as ourselves?"

"Just as our own first impression comes back, sometimes to strike us oddly, long after it has been swallowed in knowledge."

"Yes, I have noticed that too. Now, Mr. Poynz, the dance is thinning; so if you will find Nora, and take her down, and kindly order the brougham, as you offered to do, I will get Will to bring *me* as well as Celia, and we will meet you there."

Mark had no need to go to the school-room to find Nora. To his great surprise he saw her enter the outer drawing-room just then, as if glad to have left her solitude; and, though Dr. Armstrong was close beside her, she stopped and began talking merrily to a group of young people just within the doorway. She put her hand within his arm in a moment, when he told her Mrs. Pennington had sent him to take her to the carriage, and said good night to Dr. Armstrong.

"You were soon tired of the school-room," Mark said, when she stood within the empty

dining-room down-stairs, out of the way and hearing of the guests passing to their carriages.

"Yes," she assented, as her eyes followed the figures on the stairs; "almost as tired as I often was last year, in the evenings, after Miss Archer had left."

"Dr. Armstrong seems to know his way about this house very well."

"Oh, yes; he was here so often; so very often."

"And Foster was always genial to him, I suppose—hospitable, as he is to-night?"

"Yes," replied Nora, wondering what cause Mr. Poynz had to speak sternly to her; "and so were they all—Victoria especially."

"Victoria especially? That's right. It is comfortable to feel that such a thing exists as a girl to whom love is acceptable."

"Do so few girls think it acceptable?" inquired Nora, speaking languidly, as she looked out into the hall, with the very greatest appearance of interest.

"I have heard that a girl's idea of happiness is totally wrecked by the mention of love."

"Have you?"

A wide old lady in blue satin was toiling downstairs in advance of her three daughters—

a forlorn hope which she had led bravely from many a lost field,—and Nora's eyes followed her from stair to stair, her interest concentrated upon the ample satin skirts, as Mark could plainly see.

"Suppose another man to-night—even now—told you what Foster told you yesterday, you would give him just the same answer, I suppose?"

"Mr. Foster told me so many things yesterday," Nora answered, negligently even yet, though the pink had deepened for a moment in her cheeks, and then suddenly died and left them white, "that I should not remember to give anyone else exactly the same answer. There comes Celia at last. How pleased she looks!"

"*She* appreciates Will, at any rate," observed Mark, hurrying over his words a little now.

"I appreciate him too," said Nora, gravely. "I only begged him to leave me my holiday Summer without—without talking of serious things that were—utterly impossible. Who is detaining Celia on the stairs?"

"And, as I said before, if another man—myself, let us say—came to you to-morrow to talk of 'serious things,' you would ask him

too—— *What* should you ask me, Nora?"

She had lifted her head to answer him, and she did so steadily and quietly; but her eyes fell before that new light in his, and for an instant the whiteness of her face spread even to her lips.

"I should be so sorry. You have been the best and truest friend to me, and I could not have my happy Summer unless you were my friend still."

"And after this Summer holiday is over, Nora," he asked, his voice shaken by the great strength and yearning of his love, "may I tell you what would make life into one long Summer holiday for me?"

Her eyes had grown soft and beautiful while he spoke to her in this new tone, and the pink came slowly back into her cheeks; but, while she laid the words softly in her heart, Dr. Armstrong came into sight upon the stairs.

"After this Summer?" repeated Mark, bending to look questioningly into her eyes.

"I cannot see beyond," she said; and Mark felt the shudder that ran through her frame. "It will not be very long—this Summer time—will it? And I am so happy now."

"And my love and care would rob you of

your happiness?" Mark said, angrily, and even bitterly. "If love makes you so miserable, Miss St. George, it is unfortunate that you must needs win so much."

"If I have to live my life without it," she whispered, very gently and earnestly, "it cannot be a happy life : but—it must be lived."

"Nora," he whispered back, his heart beating wildly as he read the truth at that moment in her brave, sad eyes, "I will wait. I will not distress you again, but you will know how I love you. Surely you have always felt the strength and fervour of my love about you. Since the hour I saw you first, waking or sleeping, my thoughts and dreams have centred in you. They have held you so steadily, and so clung and grown about you, that they could not release you now, even if you bade me wait a lifetime instead of through this one delicious Summer. Ah! Nora, you shall see that men can wait sometimes as patiently as women, dear. Patiently? Who would not wait patiently for such a recompense as I may dream of now?"

"You will never change to me?" asked Nora, wistfully. "You will be my friend always?"

"Think me a friend if you wish it," Mark

answered, with a warm smile in his eyes. "It is only talking of the ocean as a pond. You are a whimsical little lady, and you may feel happier to shut your eyes while you sail, and fancy that the water on whose breast you lie is shallow, and—— At last, Foster! Mrs. Pennington told me you would meet us here."

"Nora," said Celia, looking out after the door of the brougham had been closed upon them, "don't you think Mr. Poyntz very handsome, in spite of his grey hair and the lines in his face?"

"He is either very handsome or—something better," returned Nora, loyally.

There was a futile attempt at general conversation then, but neither the substantial food of dress and dancing, nor the spicy seasoning of cynical criticism, could tempt successfully; and so, seeing with relief that Mrs. Pennington had delivered herself over to slumber, the girls sat silent in their corners, glad of the leisure for their thoughts.

CHAPTER XVII.

Yet it is pleasant, I own it, . . .

Whatever else it may be, to abide in the feminine presence.

CLOUGH.

AUGUST was wearing to its close. The trees in the parks had trimmed their Summer green with dainty touches of red and gold, and yet were unnoticed in their beauty, as they stood and thought perhaps of the shady forests far away, or of the mountain groves, and valleys rich in harvest, to which the fickle men and women who had been their constant companions through the Summer-time, had flown for rest and pleasure now. Languid peers, who had dined in weariness and danced as martyrs, were ploughing the Scotch moors now, knee-deep in heather, their guns carried as

feather weight, their laughter fresh and loud, their appetites almost insatiable. Solemn statesmen, sauntering in their home preserves, were graduating into keen and zealous sportsmen, ready for a coming struggle with the partridges, while those party struggles past seemed utterly forgotten. And London belles, in shadowy parks and gardens far from town, were budding fresh roses for another season.

So London was empty, people said.

"If we were at all fashionable people," remarked Nora St. George, as she and Mrs. Pennington and Celia sat alone among the roses, in that hour of the afternoon which had so rarely been left to them undisturbed, "we should not be here, I suppose. Yet how beautiful it is!"

Beautiful indeed, and Nora's delight in her pretty home was as fresh and as real as ever. This had been to her truly a holiday Summer, and day by day the blessings it had brought her grew more precious. For full of enjoyment as it was, her life was neither listless nor frivolous, and, though she laughed and said she could not study through her holiday Summer, she was unconsciously making the best of her very merriest hours, and—imperceptibly even

to herself—studying day by day. And now the Summer was nearly over, and the pretty house beside the Thames was to be given up in one week more.

“I think,” said Celia, on that Friday afternoon, while they sat among the drooping roses, with the softly stirring branches of the elms between them and the August sun, “that we shall have none but delightful days to recollect when we look back upon this Summer.”

“Not one unhappy one,” asserted Nora, so readily and earnestly that afterwards, when, as Celia had said, they looked back upon that Summer, they recalled the words and tone and glance with a light upon them which made the after-gloom a little less dense and heavy.

“I quite thought, Nora,” observed Mrs. Pennington, with one of her meek little sighs, “that before we left London you would have become engaged. Don’t you like the thought of being married and settled down?”

“Tremendously,” said Nora, with her grave lips and laughing eyes; “but no one has offered me a settlement.”

“You do not let them, dear. Certainly you cannot prevent people—gentlemen I mean—showing how much they admire you; but it

seems to me that you skilfully prevent anyone asking you to be his wife. So I fancied, my dear, that you shrank from the thought of an engagement."

"No ; that is Celia's weakness," Nora answered, with a laughing glance at Miss Pennington, who sat industriously manufacturing lace, in a large and easy garden chair.

But when Celia's cheeks grew hot and red above her work, Nora turned the conversation swiftly, and made Mrs. Pennington's grave and almost pained face break into a smile. For her daughter's refusal of her first offer of marriage was not quite an inexplicable problem to Mrs. Pennington, though it was still one which she avoided touching even in her thoughts just yet, and would avoid until she had had her husband's help to make it clear. That Celia should have rejected an amiable, promising young barrister, who had a handsome face and a comfortable property, and was in fact eligible in every way, was a matter of the greatest astonishment to the Vicar's unexacting little wife. But the simple, inherent wisdom of motherhood within her brought her own child's conduct within a light which could never touch Nora's, and made all seem right to her, even where it

was not clear. To Nora, however, who never spoke of it except in a light and passing fashion, every feeling and motive of Celia's was clear as noonday ; and, below the merriment, there lived always the steadfast and earnest desire to bring to Celia the love of the young curate who for years had, unacknowledged to herself, held the first place in the girl's heart.

So, when Celia had refused the alliance which had been offered her that Summer, Nora had, in her pretty, sisterly way, told Willoughby Foster of this, the first time they were alone ; and wondered over it with him ; and in a sedate and elderly manner expressed much regret, because Celia would be such a dear little wife, and be charming and pretty at the head of a house, and make any man's home so happy and pleasant, as well as so well-ordered. To every word of this Will agreed readily and heartily ; but, to Nora's great distress, was blind and deaf to the pleasant suggestion lurking in her eulogy, or to the dainty hint that other men could discriminate wisely, and would not waste their opportunities.

In another week Will and his old friends would be parted again for a time, for Mr. Pennington was coming to fetch his wife, who was

needed at home now, and they were all to stay there until some plan was arranged for the Autumn. It was a very evident fact that the Vicar's wife had in her way as thoroughly enjoyed this London season as the two girls had, but now her younger children needed her, because the aunt who was at the Vicarage taking her place was about to be married. So on the next Friday morning they were going to Kilver, to rest awhile in the quiet Vicarage, before they travelled farther into the world which was still so wonderful and new to Nora.

She had had many invitations for the Autumn months, but every one had been gently and gratefully declined, for the seasons to come seemed wrapped in uncertainty for her. Should they go abroad, or to one of the English watering-places? That question had been asked among them many times, but never answered with decision yet. Mrs. Foster had graciously offered to take Nora to Brighton later on, holding out the inducement that Willoughby would be able to spend a good deal of time with them there, and would ensure amusement for her; but Nora was not tempted by this consideration. Willoughby himself proposed their making a party and showing Nora

the Rhine and the Alps, and a few more of those novelties at which a passing glance is necessary for the formation of a finished human being. But, while she hesitated—there was a strange, involuntary hesitation now as to every question of her future—Mr. Poynz put in his quiet request that she would not go abroad just yet. With eyes growing brilliant in their struggle between timidity and daring, she asked him why ; but, when she saw in his face the longing he afterwards confessed to her, she set the proposal lightly and quietly aside, and at last young Foster left off urging it.

Perhaps that time for which Mark pleaded would never come ; perhaps it might never be that they two would wander together unhurried through those beautiful and wonderful scenes that she longed to see—they two, making the world beautiful for each other, while life most perfect and complete lay before them. But even if not, he must know *now* that she too had pictured the time he spoke of, and, though she had quietly passed it by, unable to consent, that she had tacitly decided that no one else should tempt her to those places of which he had told her so much, and where his strength and wisdom and experience would guide her,

while his great love would be the crowning blessing of her life.

Will's project was given up eventually with good humour equal to that with which it had been started, and all his energy was immediately employed to win Mrs. Pennington's consent to go down with the girls to Heaton, and spend with him their last Sunday in England. Mrs. Pennington, who for so long had been as a mother to him, consented readily; but Nora had planned that on the Saturday morning, just before they were to start, Mrs. Brunton should send for her. Mrs. Brunton had often before done this in vain; but now the urgent little note entreating Nora to come to her for two or three days was to be answered in person. Nora would wait to see them off, greatly enjoying Celia's excitement, and very incredulous through their prognostications of Will's regrets; then she herself would drive away, not at all ashamed of having had a voice herself in this arrangement, and building all sorts of wild romances for Will and Celia.

Never once had she been to Heaton since that Spring day when Mark had driven them, yet she could not fully have explained, even to herself, why she shrank from going. Mrs. Pen-

nington and Celia were right when they fancied that Miss Foster's inuendoes influenced her; Will himself was right when he fancied that she was only capricious in delaying her visit from week to week; and she herself was right too when she fancied that, because she saw Will so often, a journey to Heaton was unnecessary; but a vague, uncomprehended superstitious feeling lay behind, and held her most firmly of all. To speed Celia on her way to the young curate's pretty country home, she would be prompt and untiring; and to charm her with it beforehand no words were spared; but it was Celia for whom this second day at Heaton was to be made glad and happy. She had had hers.

They had been talking about it that afternoon, as they sat in the shadowy garden, and it was only in fun that Nora contradicted and threw down all Celia's shy but vivid anticipations of Willoughby's sermons, and home, and hospitality, and merits generally; for she was delighted to feel that Celia would never lose one glowing tint upon all these pleasant expectations.

"I suppose we shall see Willoughby this afternoon," observed Mrs. Pennington, glancing

towards the terrace, for the sound of the visitors' bell had faintly reached them. "How surprised he seems that his mother and sisters postpone their departure from day to day! They are to pay two or three visits before they go to Brighton, and they say a great deal about London being unendurable now; and yet something continually turns up to detain them here against their will."

"I can hardly fancy Genevieve kept here against her will," said Celia, with a laugh, "as long as Mr. Poynz finds town endurable. And I think Dr. Armstrong's visits make it bearable to Victoria too. Poor Mrs. Foster! Look! there comes Willoughby!"

"You see you cannot get rid of me, Mrs. Pennington," he said, as he shook hands with them. "I try to keep away now and then, but it's awfully hard; everything is so pleasant here, and we must make these last days merry ones, you know. I'm come very luckily now though, for Graham is at the door on his drag. He says you promised that some day he should drive you, instead of Poynz, and he was so afraid of coming in second, that he engaged Poynz days ago to come as his guest only—as his passenger, Poynz puts it. You will come,

won't you?" added Will, his excitement growing. "We shall have a capital day. They propose the Alexandra Palace, because, though you have driven there four-in-hand, you've not properly seen either the palace or the grounds. Nora, you will come, won't you?"

Mark had reached them by this time with Captain Graham, and the united persuasions soon won Mrs. Pennington's consent to the little expedition.

"Let us make haste off," urged Will, "for fear of any oncoming to hinder us. We don't want even Armstrong to-day, do we, Nora?"

She only shook her head merrily as they walked to the house. Will's opinion of Dr. Armstrong was just the open-hearted, unsuspecting opinion of old days, and she made no attempt to change it.

There was such merry quiet talk behind the fleet grey horses, that the drive could not have been wearisome even if it had been *all* through dusty, busy roads, as part of it was. And when at last they ascended the hill, they had forgotten the hot streets, in the enjoyment of the wide scene before them, and, without a thought for the ugliness of the building before which Captain Graham drew up his greys, they

could stand and enjoy the fairness of the view, and feel that they had met a fresh, pure, hill-side breeze at last.

The concert was half over when they entered the hall, and Captain Graham, who kept at Nora's side, had many cynical and witty things to say of the performers; but Nora turned his cynicism gaily back upon himself, and plucked as usual from every pleasure offered her a tiny bouquet of enjoyment for herself. Not that she wore it always in the eyes of men and women, but she held it as her own for the time, and then put it tenderly away in very love for it, without knowing that its sweetness would make the after-time the sweeter.

"You have not thought it a bore at all, Miss St. George, that is quite evident," her companion whispered, when the concert was over; "and yet how silent you have chosen to be most of the time! Were you very deep in thoughts which I might not share?"

"Very deep. I was wondering whether I could teach myself the violoncello if I tried. How beautiful it was in that symphony!"

"The 'cello beautiful?" laughed Will Foster, as the scattered party drifted together again

beyond the crowd. "Why, Nora, what will you try next?"

"Your patience, Mr. Foster, I'm afraid, for I want to see everything to-day."

"But there is nothing to see," observed Captain Graham, with the evident intention of not relinquishing his place beside her. "You cannot wander delighted here, as you have been used to do at Sydenham, Miss St. George. But we will indeed try to make the visit agreeable to you. At what hour shall we dine?"

Nora smiled. The visit was so sure to be agreeable to her, without any effort of his; and it mattered nothing to her at what hour they should dine—so little she guessed when the last figure would be put to one of the great dates of her life!

She had walked a long time at Captain Graham's side, criticising, admiring, laughing, and merrily ignoring his compliments, when at last the whole party met again, and sat together, while the band played as a background to their idle words, or varied thoughts. Then for a long time they seemed all together, breaking easily into twos and threes, differently every few minutes, but almost imperceptibly, as

they hovered in the same spots, and were arrested by the same sounds and objects. But it was Mark who was always readiest to give Mrs. Pennington his arm, and it was at Celia's side that Nora lingered when she was allowed to do so.

"Celia," she whispered once, her eyes filled with laughter, "when you talk to Captain Graham you try so hard not to seem very much interested in anything, but it is quite a failure. No two children in a hayfield were ever more ignorantly and altogether foolishly happy than you and I are to-day."

"What about the people's enjoyment, Miss St. George? Is it evident to you here to-day?"

Mr. Poynz had come to her side at last, and she turned promptly to answer.

"They, most of them, look happy; but I was just telling Celia that no one here, Mr. Poynz, can be so intensely happy as I am myself. I—I don't really think any girl in the world can be more so."

He had skilfully and imperceptibly detained her for those few seconds; then they two were sauntering very slowly on.

"Why are you so happy?" he asked, just as

coolly and quizzically as if he had not yet learned to understand her.

"*Why!*" she echoed, with a puzzled glance into his face. "I never thought why."

"Try to think, and then tell me, that I may be happier still."

"Of course," she said then, with the easiest, yet most gentle nonchalance, as she wished that the looped-up brim of her white Rubens hat could fall and shade the cheek next to him, "it is because I have so much money."

"I see. I'm rather happy, too."

"Yet you," she answered, in deep meditation, "never found a fortune unexpectedly, as I did—did you?"

"Indeed I did. A fortune beside which your wealth seems like nothing."

"So big?" she questioned, lifting her dainty eyebrows.

"Beyond all measurement," he said; and then was silent for a time, because Nora seemed so interested in every thing and every one about her.

"Tread warily among the long silk trains, Mr. Poynz, we don't like our flounces trodden on. Do you notice," she added presently, "the difference between those who come to see,

and those who come to be seen. Isn't it a pity when there is that difference between two who come together? They must spoil each other's pleasure."

"Perhaps not. I don't seem to be spoiling yours; yet my sole aim just now is to be admired."

She laughed irresistibly at the thought, but her eyes were grave again in a moment.

"Mr. Poynz, sometimes I try to fancy what you would seem to me if you were a stranger; but I never can. You didn't seem quite a stranger to me even on that day I saw you first, when you drove me home from Kilver."

"If I fancied you ever could think of me as a stranger, Nora," he said, in that great earnestness of his which was always so quiet, "I should wish that day had never dawned; though I know it now to have been the happiest of my life."

"Captain Graham wondered just now," she went on presently as they strolled out into the grounds, "how I could take any interest in so many groups of common-place people whom we met—some so shabby, and some so gay. I told him it was because I had once been poor myself. I don't want to forget it, Mr. Poynz, and

I never want to be really fashionable, if that would oblige me to forget my interest in those who are—what I so lately was.”

“If you are ever called to fill even a higher position, Miss St. George,” Mark said, “you will fill it the better and more worthily for that sympathy, which touches not only the very poor—whom so many will help—but those from whom many who could help, so often shrink, because the barrier between is not marked enough.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

Thou hast no skill, my maiden,
To take such knowledge; sweet is all thy lore,
And all this bitter.

ERECTHEUS.

“**M**R. POYNZ,” said Nora, presently, with a little cry of joy, as she stood above the lake, “I have found her at last. I have found Miss Archer. Do you see her there, sitting by the lake? Would you—would you mind going back alone, please? I *must* speak to Helen.”

He comprehended her wish to go alone, but made her promise not to return without him. Then he stood and watched her to the spot, noticing how others watched her too; but he turned away hurriedly when he saw her greeting to Helen. Yet these two friends, when the girl's glad and tender greeting was over, fell

into a strange, pathetic silence, while each looked into the other's eyes—but with such a widely different gaze!

"Helen," whispered Nora, presently, below her breath, "have you been ill?"

Then Helen raised her hand and covered her eyes for a moment, before she spoke.

"No, not ill. How good it is to see you again, Nora! And you look so happy, and so—beautiful. I have heard much of your beauty and your charm, dear; but you are just what you were in the old days, except that you are more—but perhaps the dress makes the difference."

"And where have you been since the old days, Helen?" Nora asked, trying not to look pitifully into Miss Archer's face. "I know you did not receive my letter; but—did you quite forget me, or wish to lose sight of me?"

"I wrote once to Miss Foster, asking if I might hear of you," she said, while a faint unsteady flush disturbed the pallor of her face, "but I never quite expected an answer. I had gone into Berkshire then—they knew where—and I have been there ever since."

"And have you been unhappy?" questioned Nora, very sadly, as she turned her eyes again from the flushed cheeks and tired eyes.

"Oh no, quite happy. They were all most kind to me—most kind. I am only leaving them now because my pupil is going to finish her education in Germany. There she is, Nora, in the boat with all those children and her father. I sat here because her little friends wished to go with her. They will come for me presently, and then we shall drive home again. We shall stay in town till they leave England. No, I have been very fortunate," she went on, in her patient, grateful tones, broken now and then by a short, dry cough, which struck Nora like a blow. "Don't look so moved, dear. If I seem changed to you, it is only want of rest, and that only through my own fault—my own ignorance, I mean. My pupil is a very quick and clever girl, Nora, and, as you see, nearly grown up; so that I have had to work hard to keep in advance of her. Do you understand? It was all night-work, of course—to be done after she had left me—and it tells upon me now perhaps more than it would have done when I was a girl."

"You are a girl now," said Nora, tenderly, "and you will soon be strong, Helen—so strong! And you shall not have a care in the world if I can prevent it, or anything to do except enjoy

yourself; and all your time shall be leisure; and we will go wherever it is most healthy, and travel easily. And you shall have sea air, and *such* care and love, Helen! I've looked and waited so long for you. Say you will come with me now."

"No; that cannot be," said Helen, quite firmly, though the tears had gathered in her eyes while Nora spoke. "On Monday, when I leave this pupil, I have another to go to, whom they kindly found for me. She is a little girl—an only child—so the teaching will be easy and light; and, as I am to go to her daily, I have engaged two little rooms for myself within a walk; two rather bare little rooms, because my salary will be less, and——"

"How soon may I go to this lady, Helen, and beg her to excuse you?"

"Oh no, that must not be," Miss Archer answered, hurriedly; "I must go."

"Then you shall go just for the month," said Nora, with regret; "and you will leave them then and come to me. I shall fetch you when I come back from Ireland. Where are the rooms you have taken, Helen?"

"I will give you the address," said Helen,

writing it as she spoke. "You—you will not give it to anyone else, dear?"

"Not to anyone," said Nora, making the promise readily, and resolving silently that these two rooms should be made comfortable before Helen went to occupy them, and that various luxuries should be stored there the next day.

"They are both on the ground floor," smiled Helen, "because my breath is not very good for running up and down-stairs; so if you ever come to see me——"

"*If* I ever come to see you!" cried Nora, with a great compassion in her beautiful eyes. "You will have me there so soon. Just think! Long as we have known each other, it will be the first visit I have ever paid you. And you must have everything you want, Helen. What is the use of my money to me unless I may use it as I have so long wished to do? Wasn't it funny about a fortune coming to me, Helen?" she added, trying to speak lightly.

"Very strange. Do you remember the romances you used to weave about being rich—on the money you were to earn as a governess? Do you enjoy it in reality as much as you fancied you should, while it seemed utterly out of your reach?"

"More," said the girl, earnestly. "I have never ceased wishing for you, but that was the only drawback to my pleasure, Helen. And now," she added, with a loving pressure of the hand, "I have you."

"Who is with you here, Nora?" inquired Miss Archer, after a little silence, during which she had found it hard to realise, even yet, the fact of Nora's tender, loving attachment to her.

"Mrs. Pennington, and Celia——"

"The little friend you left behind in Ireland, and loved so well, and from whom you were always expecting long letters?"

"You haven't forgotten, then?" exclaimed Nora, delightedly. "And Mr. Foster is here."

"I thought so," smiled Helen. "You are to marry him very soon—his sister says. My pupil's sister told me this. She told me many things of them and of you, when she came home after this season. And how did you evade Mr. Foster to come to me, dear?"

"He was not with me. We came on Captain Graham's drag, and Mr. Poyntz was with me when I saw you, and he will come for me again. Helen—oh, my dear, I wish I could give you a little of my health."

"It is nothing," said Helen, losing the sudden

pallor which had startled Nora. "I—I cannot expect"—with a faint smile—"to look healthy all my life, dear. There! I am summoned, you see. Good-bye. It has been a great, great pleasure to me to see you; and, if we don't meet again, this hour will be one of my pleasant memories. Will you tell Mr. Poyntz how vividly I remember all his kindness? And—but I must go. Good-bye, dear little friend."

Her eyes were quite dry, though a little feverish, when, with the gentle kiss of her pupil on her lips, she turned away, and felt that all the world was better, and brighter, and more faithful, for that hour she had spent resting by the lake. And Nora stood for a few minutes looking after her and thinking, while Mark came slowly up. She repeated to him, as they went back to the Palace, much that Helen had told her, and her own plans to make Miss Archer happier for that month, and then to win her to stay with her; but, remembering her promise, she would not tell him where Helen's home was to be. But when they joined the others Helen's name was not mentioned, for there are some subjects we lay sacredly aside when mirth and gaiety are around us.

"I hope you are immensely hungry, Nora,"

whispered Will, as he seated himself beside her in the dining-hall. "You are to enjoy everything to-day, you know, and dinner is a special item."

They jested all through the meal, in a quiet, grave way, which took from none of the fun; and then they spoke lazily of leaving in another hour's time, and strolled out to hear the band in the central hall. They had all walked on to look for seats, except Mr. Poynz and Nora, when, as they sauntered idly on the edge of the throng, Mark was met by one of his grooms.

"I came on to you with this telegram, sir," he said, breathless in his haste, "because I fancied it might be of importance. I remembered that once before you wished to go off to Florence at once, and missed the train through my delay. I've a hansom here, sir, and there's a train from Wood Green which will be in time. Richards will meet it at the Great Northern Station with your own cab, and he will have your portman-teau. We thought we had better be ready for the Dover mail from Charing Cross. Of course, if it isn't necessary, sir, no harm is done."

The man moved away when he had said this, but Mark had paused with the telegram unopened, and was looking sadly into Nora's face.

"I may have to leave you at once, Nora," he said, speaking low and earnestly. "And—I had never thought of this."

She smiled a little, not quite understanding it all. A crowd of people were passing to and fro; a crowd of instruments were rushing through the overture to *Zampa*; she was standing still, waiting to understand; while Mark was looking at her, with a great sorrow in his eyes, and—something more. And just above his head was the passionate struggle of the Laocoon.

"Hope will soon bring me back when I have the power to come, Nora," he said. "You understand me, don't you? I cannot go, letting you misunderstand me. You know what you are to me, my own beloved?"

"Yes—I know."

Her eyes were not on his face now—she could not trust them there—so she was looking at the huge, lifeless struggling figures; and then her eyes were lifted higher, and she smiled a little, for over this fierce struggle she read—

GOD HELPS A MERRY FELLOW.

She read it again and again, while the band flew on through *Zampa*, and merry laughter reached her; and she knew that Mark had

waited and spoken to her again before he opened the envelope he held, and that she had nodded with another smile—it was not hard to smile, it was only hard to see Mark's face as it had looked to her a few minutes before.

“Yes, I must go,” he said, putting her hand within his arm. “What would I give now for these last hours to come again? What a day I would have made this, if I had known it was to be broken by such a separation? Nora, my love, let this parting be our last.”

They were walking on now, very slowly; among the gay moving figures on a level with them, and the gaily-coloured lifeless ones above the crowd; and the band was playing softly.

“Although I have to go,” Mark said, pausing for a moment, and gently touching the fingers on his arm, “nothing can ever really part us, my beloved, and I shall be with you again so soon.”

Her eyes still avoided his face, and so again she raised her head, and idly read the other painted words beneath which he had chanced to pause. As she read the motto, she started a little at his side, and then repeated it in her heart, trying to smile, and tell herself that it was silly—

TO-MORROW A NEW SCENE OF THINGS MAY OPEN.

"I have deeply loved you, Nora," Mark went on, leading her towards the door, "ever since I saw you first; and now I wish I had told you long ago of this. How can you ever realize what my love for you has been?"

Oh, if she could but tell him! If he could but know that the one chief blessing of her life had been the consciousness of his love, and that her heart had been given to him long ago!

"Are you obliged to go?" she asked, wondering where were the words she wanted.

"Yes, it is a summons to a sick-bed."

TO-MORROW A NEW SCENE OF THINGS MAY OPEN.

The words were clearer than *his* words, though scarcely comprehended yet.

"I shall miss you very much," she said. And then she stopped; for a little girl who had been running before them tripped and fell, and Nora gently raised her to her feet, and kissed her; while the child looked wonderingly into the white, sad face.

"My thoughts will be with you ever, Nora. Let us say *good-bye* alone, here, my darling. Then I must take you to them."

"Good-bye," said Nora, leaving her hand in his. "I—I shall miss you so very, very much.

This has been a pleasant day, hasn't it? I am glad we came. Perhaps to-morrow will not be very different from to-day. Perhaps a new—scene of things may not—open. You will be back soon, you say. How the music changes, doesn't it? I forgot that this overture was so sad now and then. What is this large white woman, offering us the gold wreath—*Victory*, is it? I don't like it—do you?;

“Good-bye,” he said again, wondering at her tone as he unwillingly released her hand. “Good-bye, my best beloved.”

When they rejoined their party, they found, to their great surprise, that Nuel Armstrong was with them; but there was no time for any explanation from him. Mark hurriedly told of his telegram and the arrangements his servant had made, and then prepared for his own departure. He kept Nora at his side now, openly and resolutely. He seemed to see no one else. It might have been that the Palace held no one to his knowledge but the girl who walked by his side, trying so hard to maintain her old gay and debonair spirit. And, though the others looked so regretfully at Mark, Nuel Armstrong seemed to watch only *her*.

"Oh! Nora," Mark whispered, as they went down the terrace steps, "if it could but all melt away, and leave us two alone! I long to say what is in my heart to-night, and cannot—here."

"If you intend to catch the mail at Charing Cross, I advise you not to miss any train from here," observed Dr. Armstrong.

"Graham will see you all safely home," said Mark. And then he had driven off; his gaze to the last riveted on Nora's face.

"Whenever you like to go home, Miss St. George," said Captain Graham, wondering at the rapt expression in her face, as she stood listening to the distant bells—the beautiful, slight figure drawn to its full height,—“tell me, and we will start.”

"You will like to go now, Nora?" Will Foster said; and she started at the changed tone. "I see that you will, dear," he added, trying to speak more easily; for his eyes had been suddenly opened now, as they had never been while everyone had gently tried to open them for him.

"Not until Celia wishes it—unless Mrs. Pennington does," began Nora; but Nuel Armstrong's clear, raised tones interrupted her.

"Excuse me, Foster, but I have something to say to my cousin."

"Please say it here," entreated Nora, shrinking from him, as Will courteously moved away.

"You would soon be sorry if I did—and angry too," rejoined Nuel, offering her his arm. "It is not for the world to hear, Nora."

Without taking his arm, she walked with him, until he stopped in a quiet corner of an outer gallery, from which the world looked very still and wide and calm that August evening, while the church bells rang softly still, far away as it seemed. But, though Nuel had been so hurried, he paused now in a silence as deep as was hers in her great calm; and it was only when at last she turned and looked at him in her surprise that he broke it, speaking in a voice as concentrated as had been his gaze at her through Mark's farewell.

"I saw the arrogance of Mr. Poynz when he set out, Nora, and I fancied, perhaps, he entertained absurd ideas of—of paying attention to you with success. His arrogance will be short-lived enough, though, and I have come to prove that. You know what was to be your love-test, Nora. Well, I have done my part, and stood the test. I have succeeded, darling

—as men only succeed when they put their heart into their work,—and I am come to claim my reward. Of course—of course,” he added, emphatically, in Nora’s silence, “it was not to be expected that I should love you for years wholly and entirely as I have done, and win no return. Now I have come for my recompense; your own voluntary payment, dear; no forced consent, just because you will feel yourself—utterly in my power.”

He had put his hand into his pocket as he said these last words very pointedly, but she stood quite still, leaning a little on the rails, as she still seemed to listen more to the bells than to his words.

“I have spared no trouble to serve you, Nora, and I bring you to-night my claim to your love; the solution of all your old doubts, and the offer of a happy life, irrespective of any sin which has shadowed your past. I have been away from you in my search for this, but I need never be away from you again. I did not mean to tell you to-night; I only followed you here for my own pleasure. But, when I saw what a fool’s dream that man was encouraging when he went away, I knew it was time to speak.”

The bells sounded louder now, as Nora looked wearily across the wide, calm scene. Was she drifting from Mark's love and care so fast—so very fast? Did he guess how she longed for him—how soon she had missed him—how suddenly she must learn to act alone? Could he feel her suffering as he went on—so fast, and so far from her—farther with every one of these aching, miserable minutes?

"For your sake, Nora, I have followed your father's history—I never turned from the utterance of his name, as these holiday friends of yours would have done. I loved you too well to feel you were hurt by his guilt, and now I bring you—this letter."

Her whole face had changed, and her eyes were wide and feverish as she took the letter into her trembling fingers.

"It will speak for itself," Nuel said; "and after you have read it you will tell me your decision. I have no fear. After reading that, you will see there is but one way for you to act. You will see then, Nora, what has been done for you, and who has loved you best. And you will acknowledge that I have given you the surest test of love."

Still she could not answer him, as she stood

looking longingly over the wide, unknown space which lay between herself and Mark. And then there came to her a strange and horrible fancy that she stood—as she had done once before—between him and the death that was prepared for him.

CHAPTER XIX.

The trial test
 Appointed to all flesh at some one stage
 Of soul's achievement.

The Inn Album.

"**Y**OU could scarcely decipher your father's letter now, Nora. Take it home, and I will see you again after you have read it."

Dr. Armstrong's reason for saying this was threefold. He saw how unsteady was the hand which held the paper; he fancied that the words would be unintelligible to the bewildered eyes which looked so sadly out across the wide expanse; and he rightly guessed that Nora might at any moment be summoned away from him. So he even repeated his advice, as if it were a promise of respite.

"Take it home with you, darling, and I will see you to-morrow; you will have understood by that time all that your father says."

"My father!"

"Your father, Nora. Are you not glad to feel that he is found at last?"

"He has been dead all my life," said the girl, speaking wearily in her great bewilderment. "Yet you say this letter is from him. I cannot understand."

"Do not try, dear," he advised, hastily—even with eagerness. "Wait until you are alone and at rest. It will all be clear to you then, and you will see plainly what your own decision ought to be."

"Then is my father living?" she asked, turning her eyes to meet his for the first time. "Have I had a father all my life, and never known or seen him?"

"Living indeed, dear," Nuel Armstrong answered, with an inexplicable stiffness and hesitation in his suave tones; "but of course you could not know until I was able to tell you. Who else would have laboured to learn the truth for you, as I have done? Whom else could you expect to devote time, and energy, and—and money, dear, to please you and make you happy, as I have done? No, the truth has been hidden from you, Nora, all your life, but I have found it at last. And surely you are glad

to owe your happiness to one who has always been your friend and protector. I have for some time fancied your father was not really dead," he went on, in her silence; "and that the falsehood had only been told to silence all inquiries; and so, as I knew you longed to know something of your parents—even your lightest wish has always been studied by me, Nora, and this was no light wish—I resolved to face all difficulties, and learn the truth for you. I have spared myself no labour, been baffled by no repulse, and so at last am able to come to you and tell you I have conquered all difficulties, and can bring you and your father together. It is for this purpose, Nora," he continued, after a pause, gently and plausibly uttering the lie, "that I have been so constantly in England lately—in London especially, where I felt sure I should at last be successful in my search."

"Why did you tell me to-night, and *here*?" asked Nora, without turning, while the fingers of both hands closed on the letter she held.

"I explained that a few minutes ago," he answered, his dry lips moving slowly over his teeth. "I came here simply because, when I reached your house this afternoon, they told me you were here, and, as I had nothing else

to do this evening, I thought I would come and join your party for an hour, as you were going away from town so soon. I intended to give you this letter when we separated to-night, and to leave it with you to read, as I am doing now; but, when I saw Mr. Poynz appropriating your attention to himself in his confident, arrogant way, I knew it was time to speak."

"Why?"

"You will soon understand why," Nuel replied, almost gaily, in his strenuous effort to maintain his usual tones. "Your own sense of honour is so keen, Nora, that I shall never have cause to explain what you yourself will see so clearly. An Englishman of high birth would never voluntarily court, or desire to marry, any girl—even though pretty enough to suit his exacting and capricious fancy—under a name which is not hers, and to which she can lay no shadow of claim. And so, when I saw Poynz trying to make you believe he seriously cares for you, I knew it was time to speak. You could not marry him legally, and I am come in time to save you from years of misery and degradation. You understand me, Nora?" he questioned, his dry lips halting a little over the words, which

every moment grew in vehemence. "Poynz would not for a moment dream of marrying you, if he knew your real name; so I have come to spare you. If he won your promise, and then discovered the fraud that had been practised upon him, he would repudiate you with scorn and ignominy—perhaps then, poor child, to break your heart. And, if, worse than all, the secret were safe until after your marriage, and *then* reached his ears, as it would be sure to do, he would turn adrift, without scruple, the wife who was no wife."

"We have no need to talk of this," said Nora, with a sudden brilliancy in her misty eyes.

"But who," concluded Nuel, as if he had not heard, though a new light burned just now in his own eyes too, "had gained a husband by a name which had been given her to screen her inheritance of a criminal's."

"A—what?" whispered Nora, below her breath.

"A criminal's," he repeated, his smooth tones even slower than usual. "A murderer's, in fact, Nora. Hush, my darling!" he whispered, starting forward, as a swift cry passed her white lips. "Do not take it so terribly to heart. I

will help you to hide his sin, and we will make life for him less miserable and bitter than it has been during these past years, when he has vainly longed to see his daughter, and to beg her forgiveness."

Nuel's skilful reading of the girl's nature had guided him in that last hint and implied reproach; but a new page had been turned to-night which he could not yet decipher, and so, though her heart in all its shame and pain and surprise was resolute to seek and help her father, she answered, quite simply,

"When Mr. Poynz returns, I will tell him about—my name."

"Very well," said Nuel, hissing the words between his teeth, in his suppressed wrath and fear and jealousy. "It is only what any other love-sick girl would do. Your father's life signifies little, of course—*nothing* in comparison with your lover's passing pleasure. I might have guessed it, Nora," he added, again skilfully drawing upon his knowledge of her; "your father is a stranger to you, and I dare say it is impossible for you to feel his danger, and sympathise with it, simply because he is your father. It is hardly to be expected indeed. Not even as I feel can I expect you to do, for I

have in a measure shared his danger lately, and it is but natural that I should have suffered myself until I could be assured that he was in absolute security. It would be unfair for me to look for this compassion or anxiety in you, Nora dear; and so I do not blame you for not showing it. Tell Mr. Poynz, by all means, if you wish to do so. Your poor broken-hearted father will never know you have betrayed him to the very man who still cruelly seeks him—the very man,” repeated Nuel, startled just a little by Nora’s expression, but eagerly following up his advantage, “who has thought it no injustice to pursue him from place to place, and make his life that of a shunned and hunted wanderer. Tell him, by all means. He is not quite a stranger to you, as I and your father are, and he has evidently a fancy for a beautiful wife, as long as he does not suspect her to be the child of the man his vengeance and the vengeance of his family are pursuing so relentlessly. You may safely tell, for your father will not know. I would not of course betray to him his daughter’s treachery, and surely he would never *guess* this last cruel blow could be dealt him in his abandonment. Try it, Nora. Throw yourself on your lover’s mercy—great powers, *his* mercy,

whose malevolence keeps your father friendless and forsaken !”

“Dr. Armstrong,” said Nora, facing him once more—and it seemed to Nuel as if her very beauty had undergone a change, as well as her voice and her manner of addressing him—“how am I then to discover whether what you have told me—is true ?”

“True !” he echoed, hiding with a laugh his mortification at her proud and cold utterance of his name as that of a stranger. “Every one knows it is true, though no one has ever cared for you enough to undertake its proof. Rachael Corr knows it ; even Shan in his convict prison knows it, for he heard his step-mother relate the whole story. Write to them if you like, but it will only be putting enemies upon the track of your father, whom all along I have tried so hard to shield and spare ; and to whom I long to take you, that he may have one gleam of happiness in his isolated career. You shall not be asked to promise to-night, my darling. When you have read that letter, you will understand all I cannot tell you. It contains—for I was with him when he wrote it—one or two conditions to which you will consent before you see him. Then, when you have pro-

mised to comply with these, I will take you to him. Shall I not then have fulfilled the test which you yourself allowed would be the truest test of a man's love for you?"

"I shall read this letter to-night," said Nora, coldly. "When shall I see you?"

"I heard you were going to Heaton to-morrow; but I believe you will change your plans when——"

"It does not signify at all what you heard," interposed Nora; "speak as if I had formed no plans at all."

"Then I shall see you to-morrow as early as I may. And will you be ready to come?"

"To my father? Yes, I shall be ready."

"Then at what time will the others be gone, that I may speak to you alone, my darling?"

"The train—the train Mr. Foster's guests go by leaves Waterloo at two, I think. After that I will be at home."

"Oh! Nora," he cried, his passion bursting at last through the restraint he had so long held over himself, "do not look so desolate, my darling, and so proud. I could scarcely recognize you as my brilliant, wilful pet of the old days. But it will all come back," he added, with an attempt at ease and assurance; "the

gaiety and light-heartedness of your girlhood. I will give it back to you, my love, in the future, which my care shall make so free from care for you, and my love shall make so full of joy."

"Nora," he persisted, as she stood once more gazing far away over the quiet landscape, while the distant bells chimed on with a softened beauty even in their monotony, "no thought or memory of your father's crime could ever weigh with me against my faithful and devoted love, which is so great that it even extends to *him* in pity. And, as my wife, my darling, your name will be an honoured and an acknowledged one."

"As your wife?" she said, with a faint, cold smile upon her lips. "I would rather die!"

In the minute's utter silence which followed her words, when neither saw the other's face, Will Foster came up to them, moving slowly and quietly, for him; and with a nameless heaviness on his usually cheerful face. And yet never in her life had Nora met him so gladly, nor with such a sense of comfort and security put her hand within his arm.

Once or twice during the homeward drive in the quiet twilight, some one spoke laughingly of the dearth of conversation; and Celia often turned to Nora in genuine surprise, remember-

ing how gay had been their drive along the same road five hours before, and how much Nora had done towards making it so. But the change this evening was not in Nora alone; and gradually those who had at first conscientiously tried to break the spell, gave in to it. So they went home very silently in the pleasant August gloaming.

"Nora, dear," whispered Celia, as they stood in their own garden, watching Captain Graham drive away, with Will sitting silent beside him, "have your great happiness and enjoyment tired you? Or—or have you and—Mr. Foster—I mean, have you vexed each other, Nora?"

"Will never vexes anyone, I think," said Nora, unconscious how closely her heart clung just then to these old friends, and without even a smile for Celia's timid way of alluding to a possible quarrel. "I could almost as easily quarrel with you as with Will; and nothing could more clearly prove the goodness of both of you than the fact of your never having either of you quarrelled even with *me*."

"It takes two to make a quarrel," asserted Celia, the aphorism sounding quite new in her fresh young voice. "Come in now, dear; mamma will want her tea."

There was no hurry or impatience in Nora's manner through the rest of the evening; on the contrary, she seemed almost to dread their separation, and delayed it again and again, on the most trivial pretences. And when, at last, she had bidden good night to both Mrs. Pennington and Celia, in their own rooms—a good-night almost pathetic in its great tenderness—and had dismissed her maid, she sat for long with her face hidden in the cushions of her couch, and the letter Nuel Armstrong had given her still sealed in her hand. And, while she lay so, her beautiful hair pushed with feverish fingers from her white temples, it seemed to her as if she were drifting from this pleasant home and all who cared for her—slowly, yet surely, drifting out into a wide, dark, stormy, heaving sea.

“It must be—like death,” she whispered to herself, rising wearily.

Then she drew the candles near her, and opened her letter on the little table beside her couch, putting her hands upon her temples once more, as if the touch could stay their throbbing.

Slowly and very thoughtfully, after she had read the letter once through, did she go back to the beginning, and read it again, and then a

third time, even more slowly and thoughtfully ; but her fingers never relaxed in their pressure, nor did her breath lose its laboured slowness.

And this was the letter Nuel Armstrong had given her :

“ My child, we have been strangers all your life, and so I cannot tell how you may receive the tidings of my existence, which Nuel will give you with this letter. And, if I hesitate a little before trusting you, you will recollect the fact of my having been kept so long a stranger to everything relating to my only child. Dearly as I long to see you, Nora, you will pardon my caution when I tell you there are men even now upon my track, who, if they can capture me, will be well paid by the man who bears the title which should be mine, and who for twenty years has been my enemy and persecutor. This man's name you may have heard, Nora, and about *him* I must win your first promise. Unless you can consent to this first demand of mine, I cannot see you ; for, though life is not dear to me for its own sake, I would never bring on you the exposure which would be inevitable after my seizure, whether you help me in this or not.

“ The man I speak of is known in the world

as Lord Keston; I hear that he meditates seeking an alliance with you on his arrival in England, because he saw you once, and you pleased his fancy. Besides which he has been heard to say that your grandfather's savings will release his estate from its encumbrances. When you hear, my child, that it is through *this* man and his family, that I am here in hiding, you will understand why I bid you give me a faithful, solemn promise that you will never listen to a word of marriage—love is not in the question, or I would say too a word of love—from Lord Keston. Your next promise must be to keep my secret. Surely my own child will never be tempted to do otherwise. Though I have never seen you, Nuel has told me of you, and I feel that I can trust you in all. He loves you dearly, and for your sake he has been good and helpful to me. If you will come to see me, he will bring you. What happiness for me to see you both—the only two in the world to whom I can ever trust the burdensome secret of my name! Your friends would spurn you if they knew of your relationship to me; so, for your own sake, you must not tell them. But it is for *mine* I urge your solemn pledge of secrecy. My own daughter must not be the

one to lead me to death. Was your grandfather kind to you, my child? Nuel never says a word against him, but I often fear your girlhood was not so happy as I used to picture it to myself. You were his daughter's child, and in dying she sent you to him. He ought to have loved you for her sake. So all these years you see you have borne your mother's name. How could I give you mine? I cannot even sign it here, because I have not yet won your promise never to utter it to anyone. Bring me your promises in writing, and let Nuel guide you to me. How I long for you, my child, and I trust you to him! He has been my friend always, as well as yours. This I know well now. Come to me with this true friend, whom I can trust."

* * * * *

In the early dawn of the August day, Nora sat at her open window, breathing thirstily the morning air. Through the brief darkness of the Summer night she had tried to re-live her past life in thought, that she might see it all in the light of this truth which she had learned at last. But clear and continuous thought would not come at her call, while her heart ached so

heavily, and her temples throbbed with such ceaseless pain.

Just once or twice, with the pure scent of the opening roses, had come a memory—as sweet and soothing as their breath—of the few words Mark had said to her before he left her the previous day—only the previous day! But she would not hold that memory, though it would have comforted her so to lay it to her aching heart just then. She let it pass her—as the flowers' fragrance passed her—and held steadily, and without looking beyond, the courage and the constancy which, through the silence and solitude of this night, had unconsciously grown so firm and true and steadfast. There was no intricacy in Nora's reasoning. Her resolution stood, from the first, clear and distinct before her, and the way to reach it straight and well defined. Her father had the first claim upon her; he was nearest, and——

The thought broke off in a sigh of intense pain. "Oh! if I could feel as I used to dream that I should feel if a father's love were mine, and I could feel a father's care and kiss! Will it ever come? Will it come when I see him? Oh! how cruel to have lived these years with-

out him, and to have grown happy while he was forsaken !”

There was no reproach in her mind that the burden which had so long been borne for her should have been put upon her now. There was only the acute pain of knowledge, and the underlying weariness of regret for something gone from her life.

And so the morning found her, white and frail, as if after a long illness, but quite steadfast in her resolve. The silvery light of the new-born day still lay upon the grass, and the birds were scarcely yet awake, when Nora crept downstairs and out into the garden.

“Because,” she said to herself, looking up with dry, wide eyes, “Kitty always said the morning air gave me a colour in my cheeks, and they look so white now that they would startle Celia.”

Perhaps when at last Miss Pennington, sure of finding Nora at the river-side, ran down there, and summoned her to breakfast, the morning breezes *had* really given her cheeks a tint of their own colour. At any rate Celia seemed to notice no difference in the pleasant smiling glance which met her, or in the ready greeting.

"Is it not a lovely morning?" she asked, enthusiastically, as the girls strolled up to the house, arm in arm. "And aren't you glad? Will said it was sure to be fine for us at Heaton, didn't he?"

"Yes; I expect it is always fine at Heaton."

"But really, Nora, I wish you would be grave for once, and tell me more about Will's parish, that I may astonish him by recognising it in a moment. What is it like *exactly*?"

"The garden of Eden."

"Oh! nonsense. How you enjoy teasing me! Recall your first day there."

"No—no, please," begged Nora, hastily.

"Why not?" inquired Celia, even her simple credulous nature awaking to surprise at Nora's tone.

"Because," said Nora, speaking lightly again by an effort, "it was the first completely happy day I ever had, and to-day—I mean I daresay I exaggerate everything when I recall it. Wait until you have been there yourself, Celia."

"Does Will know how charmed you were with his home?"

Nora laughed merrily when she saw in what manner Celia had interpreted her words.

"Will knows," she said, with her cool little

nod; "but the knowledge of the fact did not charm him, Celia, as it ought to have done. In fact, I don't believe he cared at all; and so I could not go on admiring Will's lodgings for ever, especially as there is such a splendid old house close to them—Heaton Place, I mean. Will's church is in the park, you know, but the house is empty, and I think Lord Keston never——"

The girl's words broke off as suddenly as if the stroke of death had closed her lips. Lord Keston! That was the name of the man against whom her father had warned her; and from whom she was forbidden to listen to any proposal of marriage. Ah! how easy *that* would be to promise, while there was only one in all the world from whom she could ever listen to such words! How more than easy it would be to promise that, if this stranger sought her good will, she would remember that *he* had in some way been her father's enemy, and obliged his living in concealment! How easy it would be to remember this—easier even than fulfilling her father's other conditions.

"Why didn't you finish your sentence?" laughed Celia. "But never mind; you shall tell

me all about Heaton Place when we are in Surrey. See, mamma is beckoning us."

"Mrs. Pennington," said Nora, when breakfast was over, and it was still barely ten o'clock, "I want just to do one or two little errands of shopping before we start; I will be back in good time for the Guildford train. I will take Hannah," she added, rather nervously, "she will be useful to me. No, thank you, Celia; don't you disarrange any of your plans. Hannah will really be of more use to me than you would; and, honestly, I would rather have her this morning."

"Remember, Mr. Foster arranged to meet us in the Waterloo station at two," said Celia, when Nora had taken her seat in the carriage, and her maid was sitting opposite; "and of course you will lunch before you go."

"I will be in time," said Nora, as she nodded a good-bye; and then they drove away.

Several of those articles of furniture which, though they can be dispensed with—and *are* dispensed with in a lodging-house—add so materially to the comfort and prettiness of a home, Nora bought for Helen Archer's rooms; then a few favourite pictures and books; and then—with Hannah's help in suggesting—a

little store of dainties, chosen with that thought and tact which must make the unpacking a series of pleasant surprises. But, remembering her promise to Miss Archer, Nora had not let even her maid see the address she gave at each shop—a full and clear address which should prove to Helen that there could be no mistake.

When Nora reached home, she found Mrs. Pennington and Celia quite ready to start, but in a dispirited state, because Mrs. Brunton had sent her carriage, and a note for Nora.

“Of course you will not go to her, Nora, dear?” pleaded Celia, when the urgent invitation had been read. “Think how disappointed Mr. Foster would be; and you have often refused Mrs. Brunton’s invitations without any unwillingness.”

It was far harder than Nora had fancied it would be, to set aside their wishes in this, and keep Mrs. Brunton’s horses; but at last she succeeded. She lingered with Mrs. Pennington and Celia to the last moment, making her parting kisses very long and loving, after which she stood watching them out of sight, with an infinite yearning in her beautiful grave eyes. Then she sat down and wrote a little letter to Mrs. Brunton, thanking her for so kindly

acceding to her request, and begging her not to think her capricious or ungrateful because she could not pay the visit after all, though she had with such pleasure looked forward to doing so.

"I see how it is," Mrs. Brunton said to herself, when she read the pathetic letter an hour afterwards. "They have persuaded her to go with them. I am very glad too, though I *had* hoped to have her for these few days. How strange that a short letter, on such a trivial subject, should read so touchingly! If I were a romantic old woman, I could fancy tears had been shed over it."

CHAPTER XX.

She neither weeps,
Nor sighs, nor groans ; too strong her agony
For outward sign of anguish.

MADOC.

BARELY half an hour after Mrs. Pennington and her daughter had left for Heaton, in Will Foster's charge, Dr. Armstrong was shown into the shadowy room where Nora sat alone. She rose at once as he approached her, and interrupted his fervid address with her own calm words.

"I have read my father's letter, and I can sign the promises he wishes. Of course I can make them—for my father."

"And a promise from you would, I know, be binding as an oath," said Dr. Armstrong, with a gaze of keenest scrutiny.

"Yes, as sacred," said Nora, simply. "When shall I see my father?"

"As soon as your own heart dictates," he replied, turning his face a little aside. "I am ready to conduct you to him now. What more grateful task could I have than to take his daughter to him?"

"Tell me where he is, please, Dr. Armstrong," begged Nora, the grave, direct inquiry uttered wearily. "I will take Hannah with me. I have no need to trouble you."

For an instant his brow darkened, and his lips parted as if a passionate storm had gathered behind them; but in the next a rapid change came into both face and manner.

"If you really wish it," he said—"if, rather, you insist upon it, Nora—it must be so. I dislike it beyond all words, but you shall have your own will in everything. There is no need for me to bid you keep your father's secret from your maid, of course. I know you too well to think that necessary—you need not interrupt me so disdainfully, my darling; I am doing exactly as you desire, for my wish is to be a real help to you now. I will give you all directions. Do not take your own carriage, but the cab in which I came, and which is waiting.

Tell the man to drive you to the very house from which he has just brought me. You wish to be without my interference, and your wish shall be fully granted, Nora. When you reach the house, ask for Mr. Harris, as by that name your father is known there. That is all. But," he added, eagerly, "will you not think better of your hard decision, Nora, and let me accompany you, and take all trouble and responsibility from you?"

No, she would not change her decision; and Nuel forbore to urge her. He saw her and her maid into the cab, but never attempted himself to give any instructions to the driver; and then he bowed in silence, and watched them drive away; while Nora was conscious of a new sensation, almost of gratitude, to him.

It was quite an hour afterwards that the cab stopped before one of a tall narrow terrace of houses in an old forgotten-looking street in the north-east of London; and Nora, looking round her a little wonderingly in this new locality, left Hannah in the cab, and mounted the steep, narrow steps; while a servant-girl, who was washing them, rose and wiped her hands upon her apron, preparatory to showing this lady over the rooms that were to let.

"Mr. Harris!"—The girl's face fell a little, but her spirits were buoyed temporarily by curiosity respecting such an unusual visitor.—
"Yes, Mr. Harris's room's on the first floor—the door opposite you as you go upstairs. If he isn't there, he'll be in in a minute."

It was a close and musty room in which Nora had to wait, but she opened the window (which looked as if it had never been raised before) and then sat down near it, with her thoughts too busy to hold these meagre and sombre surroundings. In a few minutes now she would meet face to face the father of whom she used to dream so longingly. Would her heart leap towards him, and dispel at once this miserable insensibility which reproached and pained her in every thought of him? Would he ever love her as perhaps he might have done if she had been with him all her life, winning her way into his heart? Would he love her and trust her, simply because she was his daughter?

She did not know how many minutes she had sat waiting in the silence, when she heard a step upon the stairs, and rose to her feet; while in this great moment of expectation her heart seemed to cease beating. But when the

door opened it was to admit only Dr. Armstrong.

"Nora," he exclaimed, looking really agitated as he came eagerly up to her, "we have a great disappointment to bear; I found the news at my own rooms, and I hurried here at once to spare you as much as possible. Nora, my darling, your father has been tracked—or he fancied so—and has gone away again to evade his pursuers. Will you see his letter to me?"

She took the letter mechanically. The clear, stiff handwriting had grown familiar to her last night, and there was no word which could not be plainly and easily read.

"I am thankful," the letter said, "to feel that my child was willing to promise what I felt necessary. Tell her I shall ever feel assured of her guarding that written vow. You say she will bring it with her; then keep it for me, Nuel, for in time to come it will be precious to me as showing my daughter's confidence in me; and soon I hope to see both her and you. They are Keston's agents from whom I am flying now, to elude pursuit if I can. The life that has been so hard and isolated, may be brightened though in the future by a daughter's love and your faithful friendship, so I shall try to save it as I never tried

before. Tell Nora this, and give her my love and blessing. What a happiness it would be for me to think that possibly you might find me and cheer me even yet—you and she! But what right has a shunned and broken-hearted man to dream of such felicity?"

"Do you think, Nora," asked Dr. Armstrong, watching her steadily after she had read this letter, "that you could ever give up your present careless, easy life, to share such a one as your poor father's has been? *I* think it is asking too much of you. Mine is different. I am ready at this moment to make the sacrifice—I have long been ready to do so—but then my life is but a solitary one, like your father's; and it has always been my chief, almost my only pleasure, to employ it for you—and yours."

"I am ready to follow my father," Nora said, quietly, but in great earnestness. "How can I do so?"

"There is only one way"—in vain Nuel Armstrong tried to speak indifferently now; his effort at assurance was most unsuccessful, and his lips grew dry and inflexible as they formed the words—"only one way, Nora; but your father is evidently dreaming that your love and

duty will take you on in your search for him ; and I cannot hesitate in showing you this way, and how easy it would be for you, and how brave of you, to follow it. No one but myself can help you. No one could follow and ensure his safety now except myself; and, if you say you are willing to come too, nothing shall stay or hinder me. As your husband, Nora, I will restore you to your father. Only as my wife, dear, can you take a daughter's comfort to him."

"Let me go alone," cried Nora, her anguish keen and deep in a new experience of that great loneliness when doubt and sorrow must be one's own alone, and borne in secret.

"Impossible!" protested Nuel, with vehemence. "Only in utter ignorance and inexperience could you propose such a thing, Nora. Besides, I am not quite the senseless, heartless stone you have always considered me. I have worked for you, and thought of you, now so long without any reward, that I claim one at last. With *you*, I will continue my long assistance to your father. With *you*, I will follow and find him, and release him once more from the burdens which are almost too heavy for him to bear; but *without* you now I will take no further step in

his behalf. My own life is not to be spent entirely in your service, Nora, and to win no shadow of return. You see the truth now, and I leave the decision with you. Say *Yes*—a simple *Yes*—to the question which for more than a year has been before you, and we will go together and seek your father, that we may help him. And that shall not be all, Nora," he went on, with growing zeal. "We will be happy, too. Your life shall be smooth, yet filled with change and novelty. I will never let you grow weary, or repent your choice, Nora darling. Every hour of my life, and every purpose of my heart, shall be devoted to my wife; and your father shall be able to face the world at last."

"Then he is innocent?" asked Nora, breathlessly.

A curious stiffness fell upon Nuel Armstrong's face, and she could not see the sudden closing of his fingers.

"I would it were so," he answered, in a forced, slow tone. "I wish in my heart it were so, Nora! But you must know it is not, or you will not understand fully what I offer you. Not only will our marriage save your father's wrecked happiness, Nora, because we can be

with him and give him ease and affection; but you must remember also that—with this disgrace upon your name—no other man would seek you as I do.”

“Of that,” said Nora, in proud, quiet tones, “you know as little as I do, Dr. Armstrong.”

“Nonsense!” cried Nuel, his passion growing beyond his control. “I know the world; and its most cruel treatment would be yours, if—— But I cannot bear to hurt you. You know, as well as I do, that there is but that one way for you to act a daughter’s part, and I am sure your mind is already made up. The secret of your birth and name will be safe for all your life in *my* keeping, and you will have another name, too, on which no breath of scorn could ever be cast——”

“I wish you had finished,” said Nora, as it seemed with only intense weariness; while still a wondrous change had come into her face and even her voice. “I must think over what you have told me.”

“You shall, my darling,” cried Nuel, with great eagerness, “and I have no fear for your decision. Mrs. Pennington returns on Monday, and you ought to have left London with me by the time they reach home. How soon may I

come to learn your arrangements, Nora?"

"Then. On Monday," said Nora, steadily.

"One thing I ought to tell you," he said, unwillingly as it seemed, yet irresistibly urged on by that brave, steady light within her eyes whose meaning he feared. "It is only through your marriage with me now, Nora, that you can continue to possess the money in possession of which you so intensely delight. In the letter of trust, held by Doyle, your grandfather says you are to forfeit your wealth if you ever make one step towards tracing your father, or assisting and solacing him. I think it wise—and kind, too—to tell you this, Nora; for you would be a miserable girl now, deprived of the luxuries you value so much. Of course, as my wife, this could never be. Even if the fact were known—and I need not *let* it be known—you would still enjoy the money; for it would be mine, by law, after you forfeited it; and what is mine will always be yours too, as you know, my darling."

"You are generous," said Nora, the words quietly passing her white lips. "You are generous in your *thoughts* as well as in your words and acts. My forfeited wealth is but a poor return to make to you, Dr. Armstrong."

"One thing more I had better tell you, Nora," he said, his suppressed wrath growing, because he could not comprehend her, and while he saw how brave she looked in all her misery. "You have promised, in this letter which I hold—with a promise as sacred, you yourself confessed, as an oath—never to listen to a proposal of marriage from your father's enemy, Lord Keston. Lord Keston is now—and was when you made that promise—the man whom you have hitherto known as Mark Poynz.—My darling," he cried, starting forward, terrified by the whiteness of her face, "why should *this* move you? But it is the heat, perhaps. This room is close and stifling. We will leave it now. We will never speak again," he added, hurriedly and nervously, "of this man who has vented so much spleen and revenge on your broken-hearted father. When he returns from Florence—where he went to attend the death-bed of the late baron, and claim the title himself—we shall be gone. You shall never undergo the humiliation of his knowing whose daughter you are, and turning from you in his arrogance; never, my dear. I would die sooner. Now shall we go? I have told you all that I felt it my painful duty to tell you, before I let

you promise me this pretty hand, which I have sought so long and done so much to win. Now let us go. I know your father's secret is as safe in his daughter's keeping as he has lately felt it to be in mine. Shall I go back with you, Nora, or would you still be alone? Just make a choice, darling, and you shall do exactly as you wish. I will see you on Monday—not before, if you do not desire it. My one ambition always is to do just what you wish, my love. Only, only," he added, trying to smile naturally into her face, "do not look so coldly at me, Nora. Oh, my darling, blame me if you will, reproach me, defy me, command me—*anything*, only speak to me, or give me even one of the old wilful glances."

"Doctor Armstrong," said Nora, turning her eyes fully upon him now, but with such fire in them that he could not meet their gaze, "give me back the old feelings which you yourself took from me. Give me the old trust, and the old credulity, and the old innocence of wrong. If you cannot—as you cannot," the girl avowed, the passion dying suddenly out of both her voice and eyes "do not mention those old times to me."

Quite silently Nuel Armstrong followed her

from the room, and down the narrow staircase ; and it was only when she was in the cab with Hannah, and he was closing the door with a smiling farewell, that he ventured to remind her that he should call early on Monday.

How silent and empty the pretty home felt when Nora returned to it that afternoon ! Yet while the minutes were so solitary, and her thoughts so sad, the hours of the Summer evening seemed to *fly* from her. There were so few more to spend in this beautiful spot where she had been so happy. Strange it was ; but the acute anguish of her new knowledge seemed softened here into only the quiet, speechless grief of a long farewell to the old scenes. Perhaps this was from her own bravery in putting away other thoughts that day.

Sunday dawned, as lovely a day as even Celia could have desired for its enjoyment in Will Foster's country home ; and Nora, in her solitude, followed her friends in the peaceful village and quaint old church, and even smiled a little as she pictured Celia's fresh and frank delight. Then her thoughts clung about the older friends and scenes. At Traveere, with Kitty—Rachael—old Breen—Borak—and even the squirrel at the Vicarage. What was

Micky doing in that pretty garden at Heaton, and how did that solitary delicate lady, who was his mistress, spend her Sunday evenings? She must have spent so many, *all* still and solitary, like this one which was so new to Nora. Did they grow easier and better at last, or did women grow braver when their girlhood was quite gone—gone in this strange, quick way, never to come again? What would Will preach about to-night? And Mr. Pennington, far away in Kilver, would he preach of what would help anyone who had a *something* that was very hard to bear? And would anyone listen to him from that old seat of hers, where she had sat to listen to him so many and many a Sunday long ago? Was it very long ago? Yes, *very* long ago; for she was a girl then—quite a girl.

But there was one name her thoughts could not touch even in their quiet bravery through the lonely Sunday hours; for they dared not touch it tenderly just then, and they could not touch it with doubt or coldness.

It was not until the rest of the household were in bed, and she sat in the deep and utter night-silence, that she opened her desk and began to write. Her first letter was to Mr.

Doyle, and she wrote it fast and nervously. She had forfeited her wealth, she told him, by attempting to unravel the mystery of her father's life, and following him, with the intention of joining him. She thanked her guardian for all his care of her, and his unfailing kindness to her; and begged him to understand that, though she had not known that she must relinquish her wealth if she attempted reconciliation with her father, she would have acted exactly the same if she *had* known it. Then she begged him to forgive her any vexation or trouble which her conduct might cause him, and to believe that she could never remember him but as her kind and generous guardian.

When this letter was folded and sealed, she sat silent a few minutes, with her eyes covered. Then, slowly and tremulously, she took another sheet of paper, and, without addressing it definitely either to Mrs. Pennington or Celia, wrote her farewell to both.

"I shall be gone from your lives when you return," she wrote, after her touching thanks for all they had been to her—not only lately, but through her lonely girlhood—"and I know now that I never ought to have been in them.

It will give trouble and pain to you all; but for me there will be, as long as I live, the grateful, bright remembrance of your love and help. Oh! Celia,"—the tears which all day had been so far from the sad eyes, fell here unchecked—"this has been a happy day for you, and the thought of that has done me good! I have tried to think of happy things all day; so, when you look back, and remember how *you* enjoyed it, don't be sorry, thinking it had been all miserable for me. Good-bye! Good-bye!"

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





